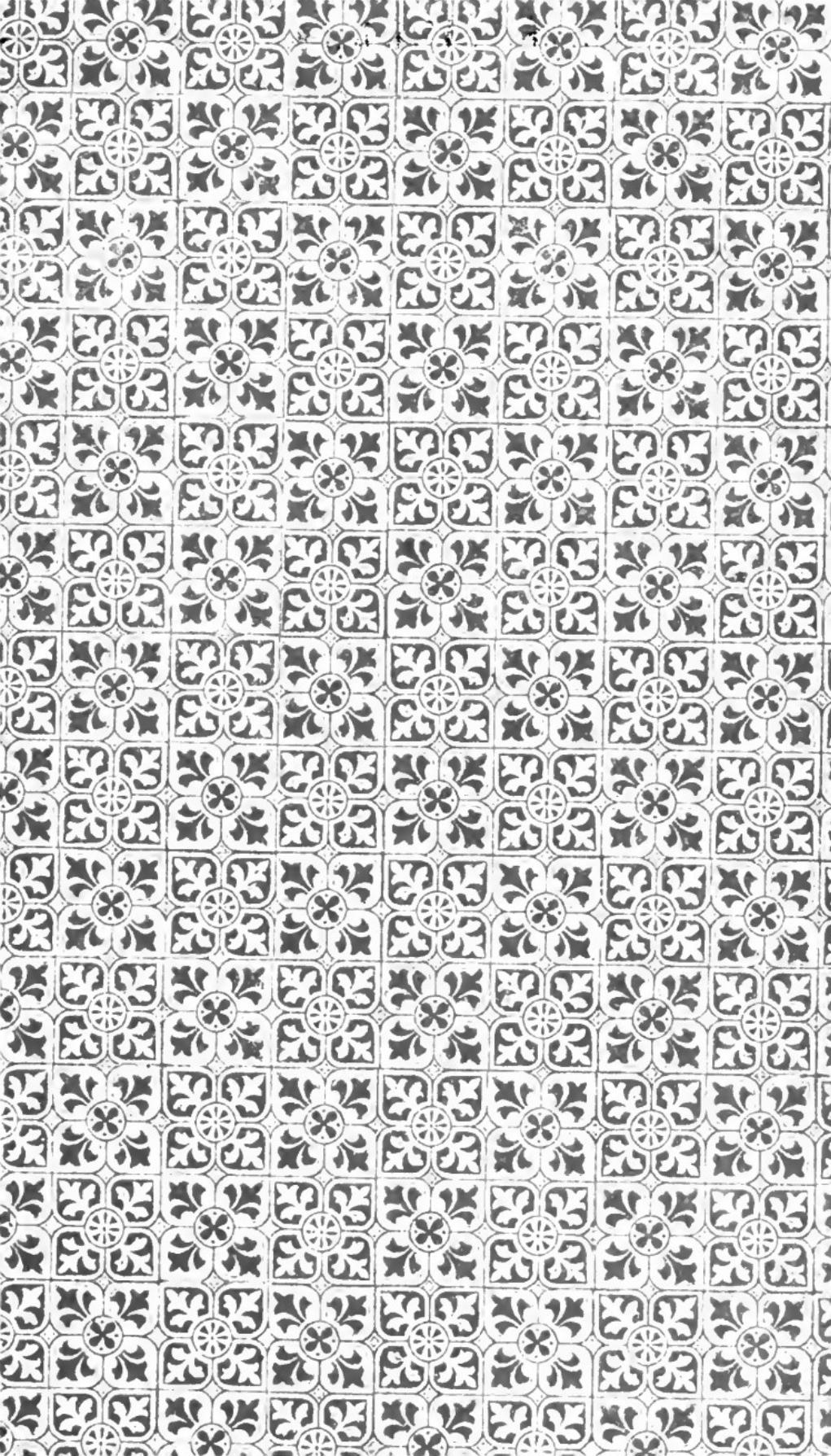


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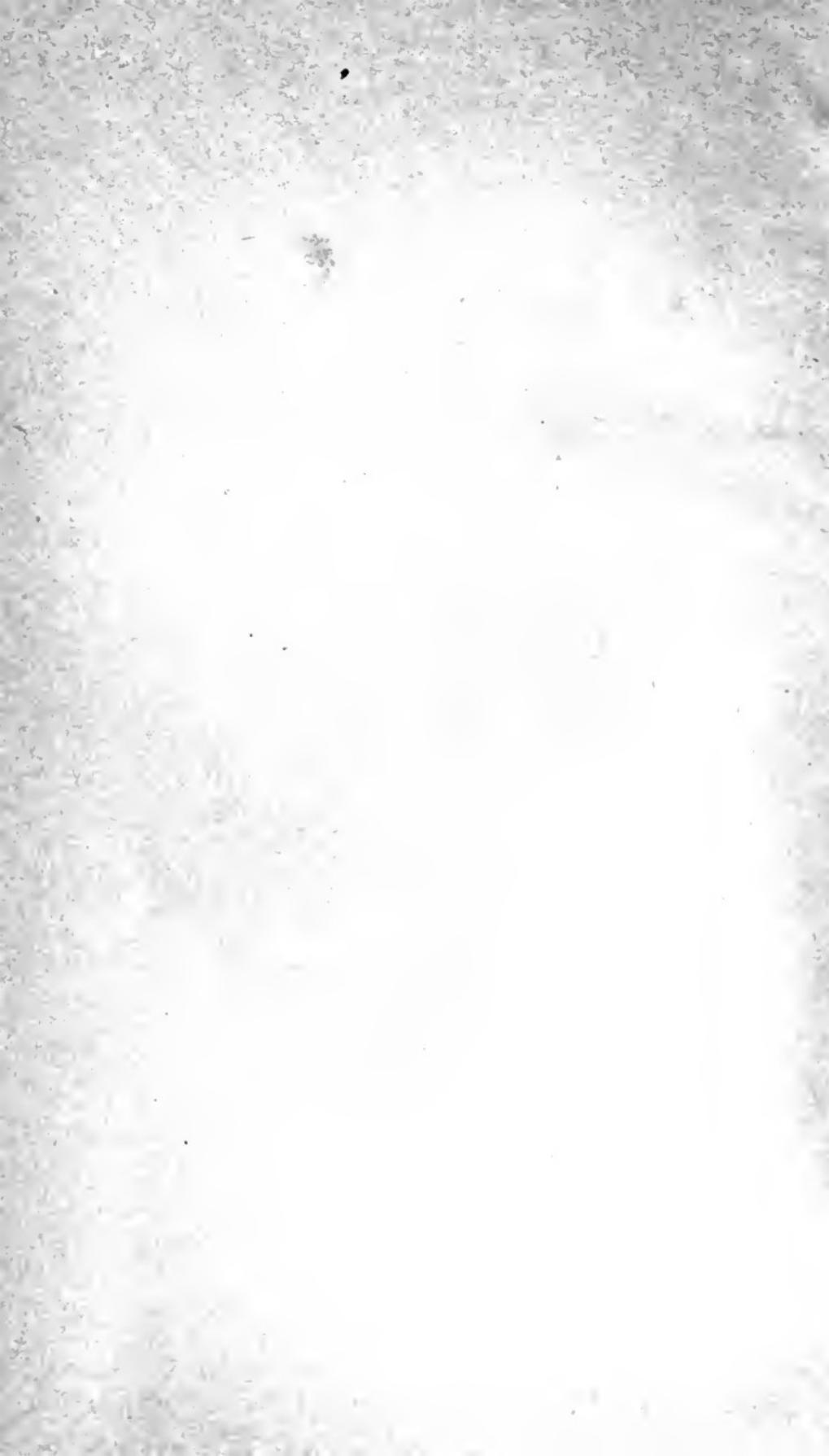


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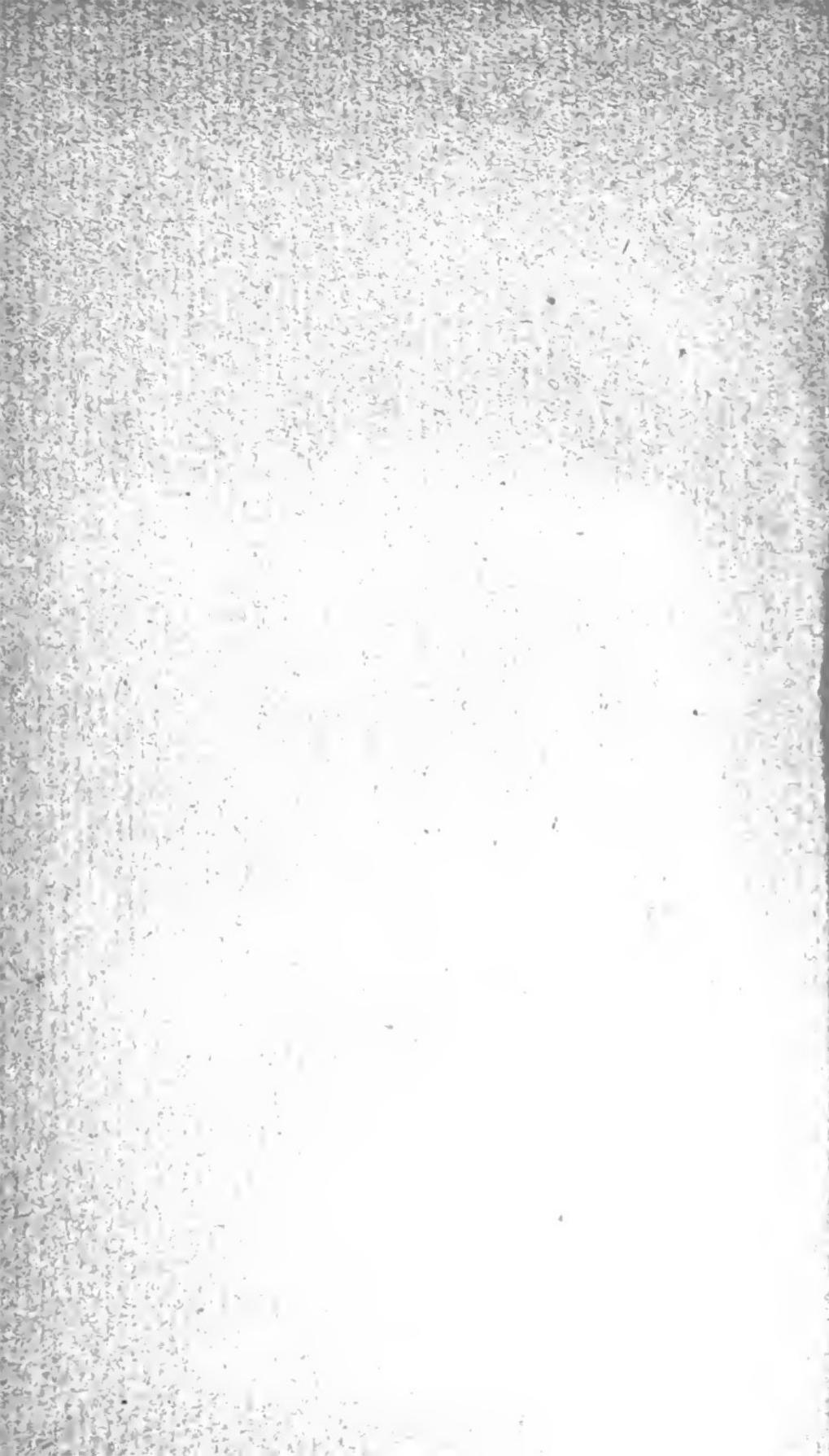
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DOT:

THE STORY OF A CITY WAIF.

BY

ANNIE LUCAS,

AUTHOR OF

"*Leonie*," "*Nobody's Darling*," "*The City and the Castle*," etc

With Twelve Full-page Illustrations by T. Pym.

BOSTON:

JAMES H. EARLE, PUBLISHER,
178 WASHINGTON STREET.

1888.



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CHAPTER I.

"NO WORK."

"**N**O work for you to-day."

The words were spoken by a burly, red-faced man, to a pale, miserable-looking woman, who stood leaning heavily against the counter of a dark cellar under a large showy shop, which stood in a dingy yet busy street of a manufacturing town; a shop in whose crowded windows ready-made garments were ticketed, at prices for which, as the customers said, "you could not make them yourselves, counting nothing for the work, let alone for the sewings."

Ah! those poor, pale, weary-looking women, standing with their bundles at that cellar-counter, could have told how good reason there was that their employers, buying stuff at wholesale prices, and cutting from the piece, could afford to sell

those garments at scarcely more than the retail cost of material, "*counting nothing for the work and sewings.*"

"No work for *you* to-day."

He threw down, as he spoke, a handful of coppers before her, and turned briskly away to attend to the others who stood waiting.

No work ! It mattered little, one would think, to one so evidently unfit to do it as the poor pale creature to whom the words were addressed—a tall slight woman, whose scanty garments hung loosely round a pitifully attenuated frame ; whose dark eyes, sunken deep, seemed yet unnaturally large, in contrast with the white, wasted face ; whose breath came in such short, laboured gasps through the dry bloodless lips.

Mattered little ! Ah, the words rung a very death-knell in her ears. Not her own only—that had mattered little, for though she held no hope of home and rest beyond the grave, such a life as had been hers for long must needs rob death of half its terrors—but her child's ; the little helpless heiress of all her sin and sorrow, between whom

and starvation, or the still more dreaded pauper-lot, interposed only her weak arm.

She did not offer to take up the pittance flung to her, the price of long days of unremitting toil, of very life itself, pressed slowly, surely out—did not move, but stood like one stunned.

No work! Then she and Dot must starve at last; or worse, the landlady would fulfil her threat and turn them out into the streets; or worse still, send for the relieving officer when she was too weak to resist, and he would take them to the workhouse, where they would part her and Dot. Too exhausted—after the, to her, long walk she had had, coughing at every step, in the bleak December rain—to think clearly, she could only *feel* all this, and helplessly, hopelessly gaze at the great wave of fate, striven against so long in the heroism of mother-love, approaching to overwhelm her and tear Dot from her arms.

At last she was startled by the raised voice of the paymaster, who, glancing up and seeing her still standing where he had left her, called out roughly,—

"What are you waiting there for? Your money's right, and your room is wanted. Go!"

She roused then and took a step towards him, her trembling hands clasped, her eyes full not of tears, but of something sadder still.

"For work," she said; "I'm waiting for work! Oh, sir, do give me some! I'll do it better and quicker this time, I will indeed, and—and for what you are pleased to give me."

"And that'll be nothing," he said. "Can't put up with no more of yer boggling. Come, be off!"

"It was the cough, sir, that made my eyes so bad. I'm better now, and——"

In sad denial of her words a paroxysm of coughing interrupted them, and shook her frail form like a reed.

"Looks like it," said the man, curtly. "No, it's no use; can't have good work spoiled."

"But, sir," she pleaded as soon as she could speak, "if you don't give us work we must starve, my little child and I. We're alone in the wide world, sir——"

'Oh, there, shut up! none o' that cant. There's the work'us ; you can go there, I s'pose ?'

"I'd *die* first," she answered, with passionate bitterness ; "for they'd take my child from me, my tender darling that is more than life to me. Ay, I'd die—and worse," she added, a terrible gleam coming into her eye. She paused a moment, a strong shudder shook her frame, and then, clasping her hands as if in terror, she pleaded once more—"Sir, for God's sake, save me—give me work !"

"I tell you I can't and won't," was the angry reply. "What d'yer mean by bothering like this, when you've got yer answer ? Be off with you, I say, and sharp."

She fixed a look upon him before which, hardened as he was by wont of resistance of pity and pleadings, by familiarity with suffering and need, he cowered uneasily, and which haunted him for many a day.

"Then a just God will hold *you* guilty of what you drive *me* to," she said, in a loud hissing whisper ; and turning, strode out of the place, in

the forgetfulness of passion leaving her hard-earned coppers on the counter.

"Independent, it seems," said the man, with an uneasy laugh, making a motion as if to take up the money.

But from the group of pale-faced, heavy-eyed women, who had been listless spectators of the too familiar scene, one, a cripple, pressed forward. "She's forgot it, poor soul," she said; and, gathering up the coppers, hobbled after her with what haste she could.

She need not have hurried. The false strength of passion had soon exhausted itself. The poor woman was leaning, breathless and gasping from her reckless ascent of the cellar-steps, against a wall a few yards off; but something more than the pallor of physical exhaustion was on her white, set face; the light as of some awful purpose gleamed in her wild fixed eyes.

Her pursuer had to touch her to gain her attention.

"Tha's left thi money," she said, tendering it.
"Eh, poor soul, but aw'm sorry for thee. But

dunno thee look loike that," as the dark eyes turned blankly upon her. "There's One as cares for thee and t' choidl. Dost know Him, my poor lass ?"

The girl—she was quite young, although so wan and worn—shook her head. "Nobody cares for me," she said.

"Eh, tha'rt wrong ! tha'rt wrong !" answered the cripple, with a beaming face. "Aw thowt t'same once, when aw was just as needy and lonely as thySEN. But aw know better now. There's One as cares, my lass ; One as loves and One as helps, bless His name ! Ah ! tha' doesna' believe it ?" in a tone of infinite regret ; "well, aw was loth to mysen. And aw conna speak loike her as He sent to tell't me ; and tha's not fit to stand i' this cold and wet, if aw could. But si thee, lass," and she drew from her bosom a tastefully painted card, carefully wrapped in paper. "Si thee to this. Nay," with sudden resolution folding it in its wrapper again, "but aw'll give it thee. Tak' it home, and tak' Him as said those words at His'n, as aw did, and ye'll foind Him true, bless His name ! as aw've done."

Passively the dazed, exhausted creature took the card and coppers, with hardly a word of thanks—never to notice that to the latter were added a few of the cripple's own hard-earned and sorely needed coins—never even to suspect that any sacrifice had been made in the gift of that card—treasured memorial of the happy day when the light of heaven first shone upon a dark path and darker heart, and of the gentle messenger through whom it came.

But the giver needed not *her* thanks. She went her painful way with tears in her eyes, but a great joy at her heart—the joy of accepted sacrifice—of love poured back in overflowing measure from a Divine heart to her own. And against the story of that deed in the recording angel's book above stands decreed — “an exceeding great reward.” For if the great pity of a woman's heart had prompted the gift of pence at a cost of cold and hunger, the great love of a redeemed soul had compelled the offering of that one treasure of a bare, beautiless life.

CHAPTER II.

A DESPERATE PURPOSE.

M ECHANICALLY our poor friend put coppers and card, uncounted and unread, into her pocket, and started on her homeward way, her face wearing the same fixed look, half terrified, half desperate. It was evident that the cripple's kindly and cheering words had fallen on her outward ear alone.

Slowly and painfully she made her way into a district where the streets grew narrow and shabbier, the air thick with smoke and gutter-reek. Ever and anon she stopped, partly to gain breath, partly to hold muttered converse with herself; for her pale lips moved, and her thin hands worked, though no words were audible. Yet she would start and look round with a guilty, frightened look, and press on again, with such haste as she could, on her weary way.

At last she sat down suddenly upon the steps of a deserted warehouse in a narrow gloomy street. "I'll settle it one way or other before I stir from this," she said aloud, and burying her face in her hands, sat motionless as stone.

One or two people who went by glanced carelessly at her, and passed on, thinking, if they thought at all, that she was asleep or drunk. Asleep! And the while a battle such as fiends and angels watch with breathless interest was being fought in that poor soul!

She looked up at last, her white face and wild dark eyes terrible in their anguish and despair. "I will do it," she said again aloud. "Ay, I will do it! It will be better for her—surely better for her. For if they part us there, it will not hurt *her*. No hunger there, no pain, no crying—not even for a lost mother! 'Nothing that defileth!' Ah me, how plain the words come back! No dirt, no rough coarse ways, no sin, no shame! Oh, my lamb, my innocent! what better can your poor mother do than send you there, even if she loses her own soul in doing it?"

She rose, the energy of a fixed purpose apparent in her feeble steps, and walked steadily back by the way she had come until she reached a druggist's shop, before which one of her longest pauses had been made.

She made no pause now ; her end, and the means to that end, and the way to obtain that means, had all been settled in her mind beforehand.

She walked straight into the shop, holding her hand to her face and rocking herself to and fro. "I want a drop of laudanum, if you please, sir," she said to the shopman. "I am almost worn out with pain, and it is the only thing that gives me relief."

"How much?" was the half-suspicious response.

"Well, sir, just the worth of a few pence, which I can ill afford to spare ; but what with loss of rest and pain I cannot do the work that is bread and shelter to me and my little one. But I should like a goodish drop that would last a bit, sir, for I live a good way off, and time and strength are money to me, that needs both sorely."

"You understand its nature, I suppose—use it only outwardly."

"Well, sir, mostly, though I have taken a drop or two occasionally at night, to make me sleep. There's no harm in that, I know, having had a relative who took it regularly."

"No *harm*, so as you don't take more than ten or twelve drops, and are careful to drop it exactly—but no *good*. Better keep to the outside use; and mind and put it out of the child's reach," said the druggist, quite set at rest by the woman's apparent simplicity, and wondering much at the contrast her speech and manner afforded to the wretchedness of her appearance. "Have you a bottle?"

"Indeed, sir, I have not. I did not think of it when I came out; maybe you have an old one of some sort you can put it in?"

"I have plenty of bottles, but I usually charge for them. However—" He turned away and filled a small phial. "Be sure you keep it out of the child's way," he said again, as he handed her the bottle and took the demanded payment—only

half the real charge ; for he pitied and thought to help the poor woman, whose suffering and need were so evident. So blind and blundering are we in our kindliest purposes.

With a muttered "Yes, sir ; thank you, sir," she hurried from the shop, and turned homeward once more, clenching the fatal phial tightly in her hand and facing a driving shower of sleet.

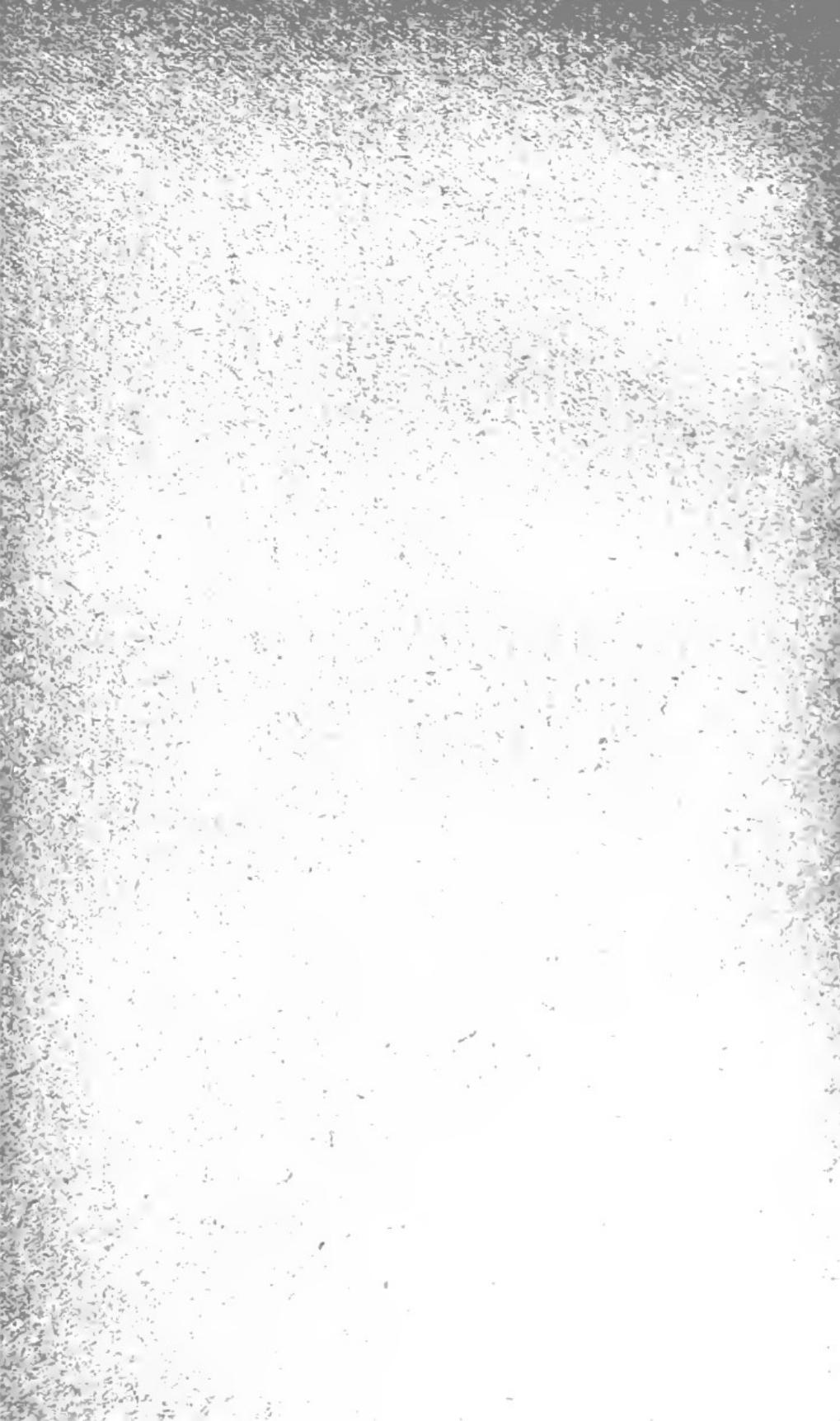
Can we wonder much at the terrible resolution to which that poor thing had come ? The work upon the wretched proceeds of which she had hitherto kept body and soul together refused her ; without a friend or a helper, as she thought, in the wide world ; with rent owing for the miserable room she tenanted ; with the more than possibility of being turned out into the cold, pitiless streets ; with the only refuge open to her, open only on a condition more terrible than death itself —that of severance from the child she loved with all the fervour of a passionate nature, all the concentrated intensity of a lonely and embittered heart ; with the terror of leaving that child, as her rapidly failing strength told her she soon must

leave her, a helpless waif on the troubled, unclean sea of city life, to become, too surely, that from which she, sunk and wretched as she was, shrank with loathing ; with bodily powers exhausted by privation and disease—is it wonder, I ask, that the grave, with her darling folded safe on her breast for evermore, seemed a welcome refuge, beyond whose quiet rest her wearied spirit had scarce energy to look ; that, taking the form of a tenderly-cradled sleep, murder seemed the best gift her fettered mother-love could give—suicide scarce a crime that a merciful and righteous Being could punish ?

But to understand her present position, the strength of its misery, the depth of its degradation, we must know something of her past. Outcast and waif as she was now, she had been tenderly reared. The only daughter of a small but well-to-do farmer, her childhood and youth had been spent amidst the fields and woods of a breezy upland county. The idol of her doting parents, she had been brought up—as they, in their fond and foolish pride in a grace and beauty

and refinement of taste unusual in her class, declared—"like a lady." The weeds of her character, vanity, and ambition, and self-will, had been fostered rather than checked by their blindly admiring affection. And when temptation, strong temptation, came to her, they, simple folk, full of the loyalty of old-time feudal faith, were proud and pleased that the Squire's son should be quite taken with their fair Alice, and dreamed not of peril till their eyes were opened by gossiping tongues. Too late! Their fears and tears, their entreaties and commands, were alike disregarded. A girl whose nature has never been brought into subjection to authority, principle, or affection, in the simple rights and wrongs of every-day life, is not likely to yield her will when the force and glamour of a young, fervent heart's first passion-dream is upon her.

Alice did not, to her bitter cost. Young, romantic, and unsophisticated, she went scornful and smiling to her fate, finding, where her pure mind, passionate heart, and blind faith had looked for an Eden of bliss, a pit of ruin and shame.



CHAPTER III.

WORSTED IN THE BATTLE.

FEW words will tell how, step by step, Alice had come to be what she was. A fevered passion-dream, whose every pleasure had a sting ; a sharp and bitter awakening ; a sad reluctant letting go of hope ; a lingering death of trust ; and then, the crowning woe of all, desertion—and, with it, sickness almost unto death. Alas ! alas ! a common and an oft-told tale !

Alice recovered, to find herself, with a helpless babe and tarnished fame, alone in the wide world. Her long sickness amidst expensive surroundings had almost exhausted the money she possessed. Too proud, even in her loneliness and weakness, to beg the forgiveness and aid of parents whose warnings and commands she had contemned, and to brook the thought of returning, a mark for the

finger of scorn, to the peaceful home of her youth —too pure-minded even in her degradation to touch more of the wages of shame, she fled, as soon as her strength permitted, from the place where her too evident position exposed her to temptation and insult, to a large manufacturing town, where, under an assumed name, she hoped to hide her identity, and maintain herself and her babe.

It was easy to do the former, but ah! how pitifully hard for a weak lonely woman, without skill, without recommendation, and burdened with an infant, to do the latter. She got work indeed, at last, after long effort, and after having parted with almost every article of value she possessed. But such work! and such pay! Want of skill precluded her taking any but the coarsest and plainest; want of strength soon became an obstacle to her accomplishing enough of that to supply the barest needs of life. The child of the breezy upland farm would probably, under any conditions, have drooped in city air; but in the ever closer and dingier rooms, in the ever lower

and more crowded streets, which her narrowing means forced her to occupy, Alice withered like a flower.

A few weeks before our story begins, she had made her last possible move while she retained anything like a shelter for herself and her child. It was to a miserable garret at the top of a crowded lodging-house, in a narrow and filthy court in one of the lowest parts of the city. There, sickened with despair, and with the horrible things she was obliged to see and hear, she had been at last worsted in the hopeless struggle. Her illness had frightfully increased; her rent had fallen into arrears; her child, to whom at all cost she had hitherto given bread at will, had been pinched with hunger. For though, with the desperate heroism of mother-love, she toiled on and on, her trembling fingers and failing eyes almost refused their functions, and three days scarcely saw the task of one achieved. What was the result, we have seen.

And all through this dreary downward course did not Alice's pride give way? Did not her

heart, yearning over her own child's daily suffering, admonish her how her parents, once so fond and proud, were yearning over theirs ? Oh yes, often and often at first ; and once, when her darling was sick and suffering—dying, she feared, for want of pure air and needful em lies and food, she broke down and wrote a sad, imploring letter, telling of her bitter need, and pleading for forgiveness and help for her innocent darling's sake—wrote, and waited day by day for answer ; and, when none came, in bitter hopelessness steeled herself to suffer and be strong. Either they were dead, heart-broken by her fall, or pitiless.

And did she not then turn to Him who, when father and mother forsake, forsakes not (Psalm xxxvii. 10), who glories in the title of "helper of him that hath no helper" ? (Psalm lxxii. 12.) Alas ! no, for she knew Him not.

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNEXPECTED CHAMPION.

HER terrible purpose settled, and the means to its execution procured, a dull calm, intensified by physical exhaustion, fell upon poor Alice's mind. The strained, terrified expression of her face gave place to one of utter sadness; and as she feebly dragged her painful way through the blinding storm, tears mingled with the icy raindrops that coursed down her cheeks, and ever and anon a low, bitter sob heaved her breast. She was dimly conscious of an unutterable pity for herself—so young, so wretched, so utterly forsaken; of a strong revulsion against the fate to which she had doomed herself; of a helpless, passionate longing for bodily comfort, rest warmth, and kindness. The hot glow rising through a grating from a baker's oven, laden with

the fragrant odour of new-baked bread, gave this longing definite and practical form. The poor sad mother and hungry child, whom somehow she seemed to be pitying as strangers, should have one poor meal together yet; one of those small hot loaves and large currant buns, and a pennyworth of tea and milk, would make them a very feast. The rude loafers and angry landlady in the lodging-house kitchen might be faced once more, for it was only once, and the little hungry, bright-souled child would clap her little blue hands, and laugh, and babble out her tale of baby joy over the warm and pleasant food and drink, as gleefully as the pampered darling of some bright home; and the mother would watch and feed her, and almost forget the chilled, deadly faintness of her own frame in the blessed sight; and then—and then—she would wrap her in all she had of warm and dry, and rock her, smiling and content, to a sleep from which she should wake to tears and cold and hunger nevermore.

She went into the shop; a bright-faced, bright-haired man, of whom his customers said, "he

always had a pleasant word, whether you went for pound or penn'orth," served her, and remarked cheerfully,—

"Wet and cold to-day, mistress."

"Ay," she answered bitterly, and turned away with something between a groan and a sob; for she had seen, through the open door of a living-room, beyond the shop, a woman seated by a glowing fire, with a rosy, romping baby in her arms.

"Poor thing!" muttered the baker, looking after her as he dropped the pence into the till. "She must be wet to the skin. And how ill and poor she do look to be sure. Thanks to the drink, I'll engage. And to think now, how extravagant her sort are. Nothing but the best 'll serve 'em. Bread hot from the oven, and me willing to sell her a stale two-pound half price. It's disgustin'!" And he went back to his cosy fireside, and tossed his crowing child, while the happy mother looked proud and smiling on.

What a contrast! thought, or rather *felt*, poor Alice. Ah! could those who saw *her*, a drenched

and ragged and despised outcast, crawling unpitied and alone through those foul, dreary slums, have seen, too, into the luxurious drawing-room of a splendid mansion, where, in a tropical atmosphere of warmth and glow and beauty, the man who, trading on her ignorance, simplicity, and affection, had lured her to her ruin, sat caressed and flattered and applauded, they would have seen a greater.

By the time that she had threaded the network of slums that led to the one that sheltered her, she was so exhausted that only the thought of her poor little Dot, whom the sheerest incapacity for carrying so far had lately compelled her to leave behind, crying her little heart out in loneliness and hunger and fear, kept her from sinking fainting on the pavement.

She entered the doorway of her miserable abode. The bitter cold and rain had driven away the loungers that usually blocked it, but from the crowded kitchen came a Babel of coarse voices, and sickening reck of rank food cooking; and at the stair-foot sat two wretched children,

who, quarrelling over a mouldy crust found in some gutter, were using language loathsome from any lips, but fearful from those of childhood.

Shuddering with the thought, "Dot might come to this!" Alice began to drag herself up the steep and broken stairs, when a harsh voice stopped her, and a tall, gaunt woman, with sharp, shrivelled features, and fierce black eyes, came hurrying out of the kitchen. "Here, here, young ooman," she cried, in a hectoring tone, "not so fast, if *you* please. Afore you go up them stairs you and me must have a settlin'. Jist remember, if ye please, how long it is since I've seen the colour of yer money; and axe yerself if it's reason as I, as is a lone widder, sh'd house ye and yer brat rent free, when folks is ready to pay me good money, and reg'lar, for yer room. Axe yerself, I say."

Poor Alice cowered before the loud, rough voice and angry eyes, that pierced her like a stab.

"I—I'm very sorry —" she began.

"Hoo ay, 'very sorry,'" essaying with little success to mimic Alice's soft speech. "Very

sorry I daresay, and so am I. But sorry-fur ain't a cure-all, by no means; and either I see yer money to-night, or you and yer brat goes packing. There's a gen'leman in there as'll take yer place and thank yer, and pay me a hextry thrippence too. So I axe yer again, can yer expect me, as is a lone widder, to refuse a sound tater for a rotten egg!" And folding her arms akimbo, she looked unutterable things.

"Of course I couldn't expect you to shelter me without pay, Mrs. Wicks," said Alice humbly, "but this is all I have in the world; you can take it if you will," and she held out her few remaining coppers in her open hand.

"Fourpence ha'penny!" ejaculated Mrs. Wicks. "Fourpence ha'penny! And you owin' four-an'-sixpence."

"I can't help it," said Alice wearily. "I never meant to wrong you, Mrs. Wicks, and I have worked and worked till I am dying, I think."

"Then yer'd best go to the hospital, or 'firmary, or work'us, or somewhere," snapped Mrs. Wicks.

"I won't be put upon no longer ; so just fetch yer brat, and tramp."

"Not to-night ! oh, not to-night !" pleaded poor Alice. "I cannot ; I should drop in the streets. Oh, Mrs. Wicks, have mercy."

"And so I will, on myself, as is a poor lone widder, and been put on shameful, and deceived by your fine ways and promises. Come, fetch the brat and be off with ye, yer ——" And working herself up into a passion, as those who are conscious of a bad cause are apt to do, she poured out a torrent of invectives upon the poor helpless creature, who leant, white and trembling, against the wall.

"What's to du ?" asked a woman, who entered in its midst, as she set down the two large flat baskets she carried, and wiped the streaming rain from her face—a large coarse face, roughened by exposure and blowzed by drink.

"To do ! Why, here's this madam, as owes me four-and-sixpence, as I, being soft-hearted and believin', have let run for a room as is worth one-and-nine a-week—every ha'penny of it, and

as I let her have at one-and-six—a-hofferin' me fourpence ha'penny, and a-telling me it's all she has in the world, and refusing to budge. But she shall, and afore I stir from here, or my name's not Sarah Wicks."

"I *cannot* go to-night," gasped poor Alice, turning an appealing but unhoping look upon the new comer. She knew her, for she was a fellow-lodger, whose room was near her own,—a drunken, roystering hawker,—there was nothing to be hoped for from *her*. "I am worn out with walking, and faint with cold and hunger. I will go—I must—but oh, not to-night—for mercy's sake, not to-night!"

"To-neet! Aw sh'd think not! Sall Wicks, tha'rt a hard un, but tha's noan th' heart to mean it."

"But I do mean it. Why not?"

"If tha'd been out one o' the noine hours aw have been in this rain, tha'd ha' no need to ask. Why, woman, it isna fit to turn a dog out in, let alone a sick woman and a choild; foak would croi shame on thee an tha didst."

"I don't profess to keep a refuge for the destitoot, bein' a poor lone widder, but lodgin's for them as can pay for 'em," retorted Mrs. Wicks. "Perhaps, as yer so charitable inclined, Bess Branker, ye'd like to pay the fine madam's rent, as passed ye with her nose in the air as if ye was carrion" (an exaggerated fact; poor Alice, in her sensitive shrinking from her coarse surroundings, had more than once repelled the rough advances of Bess, who, when in drink, was as sociable as hilarious), "and cook her a tasty bit of yer fish, if yer 'as any good enough left."

"Aw'd du t' last and welcome, for oo looks welley clemmed, poor thing—and pay t' brass too, to one as wanted it—but that's noan thee, Sall Wicks. And aw tell thee aw'm not goin' to see yon poor lass, as has dune t' best oo could to fend for hersen and t' choild, kicked out like a dog as has stolen t' dinner, on such a neet as this. So go thy ways to thy room, my lass; tha shalt stop there till mornin', or my name's not Bess Branker. Nay, never fear *her*," as Alice's sad, appealing eyes sought Mrs. Wicks's, "oo knows

which side her bread's buttered too well to quarrel wi' me. Coom along, Sall, and see what aw've got i' my baskets. Aw've had a gradely day."

As Bess figuratively asserted, Mrs. Wicks knew her interests too well to oppose Bess Branker in a thing whereon her heart was set. The woman earned, by sale of fish and poultry, what, but for her drinking habits, would have been a comfortable living, was free with her money, paid her rent regularly, and treated Mrs. Wicks to many a tasty meal of fish, of which she was excessively fond.

She gave way to her now, therefore, with tolerable grace. "Well, till mornin' then," she said. "Remember, young ooman, not a hour longer," and retreated to the kitchen, slipping Alice's coppers slyly into her pocket as she did so.

Till morning! It was all poor Alice asked, or needed. The shelter she and Dot would require after that would be freely given.

CHAPTER V.

BESS BRANKER'S TEA-PARTY.

A BOUT an hour later, Bess having dried her drenched garments at the kitchen fire, and treated herself and "pals" to a hot dram from a quart spirit bottle she had provided for her evening's refreshment,—it having been, as she said, a good day with her, the weather making people glad to buy at their doors instead of sallying forth into the rain,—was busy in her room, on hospitable thoughts intent.

It was a small, wretched place, pervaded with the smell of stale fish. A low wooden bedstead in one corner, on which was spread some straw and dirty sacking, with a tattered horse-rug for coverlet, an old rickety table, a three-legged, seatless chair, a hamper, a deal packing-case turned bottom upwards, and the two large flat hawking

baskets, completed all the furniture. The window was grimed with dirt, and its many breakages stuffed with rags and paper. The roof and walls were blackened with smoke and draped with cobwebs. The floor looked—what in all probability it was—a stranger of years from soap and water. The grate was rusty with disuse, for Bess was of sociable habits, and usually preferred to take her meals in the kitchen.

And yet this woman's weekly earnings averaged a sum amply sufficient, but for her fatal appetite and the thriftlessness and indolence it engendered, to have rented comfortable rooms in a decent locality, or a neat cottage in the suburbs, and to have maintained it in homely comfort.

But now there was a bright fire burning in the grate, a kettle was singing on it, a teapot with broken spout and handle kept company on the hearth, from which the heaped ashes had been roughly cleared for room, with a large dish of Finnan haddie, well cooked with plenty of butter at the roaring fire below. Two cups and a mug, a loaf of bread and a dish of butter, flanked by a

jug of milk, a bowl of white sugar, and the quart bottle still three parts full, stood on the table. In the midst, a dip candle, fluttering and flaring in the draught of the window, blazed in a tallow-coated tin candlestick, across which two more were laid in readiness. Bess, her coarse face beaming with pleasure, was busy cutting substantial shives of bread-and-butter, keeping a watchful eye the while upon the kettle.

A gust of wind, coming through the opened door of a broken-windowed room opposite, burst hers open. And then, feeble but distinct, was heard the low, monotonous wail of a child. All the brightness passed from Bess's face as she listened a moment, and then went and shut the door. "Aw conna bear t' hear it," she muttered. "It moinds me too much—hey dear!" and she sighed heavily.

Again the door burst open, and again the wail came in. This time Bess did not shut it. "It's cowd it is, poor little thing," she muttered. "Aw wish aw'd browt um in afore, but now that kittle 'll bile over if aw goes, as sure as eggs is housen."

Ah ! theer it goes. Now, tha shall have a good warm, my pretty," she said, as she hastened to fill the tea-pot.

Setting it down on the hearth again, and giving a satisfied glance to her preparations, she went to summon her as yet uninvited visitors—Alice and Dot.

Along a passage, lit only by the unwonted glow from her room, Bess went, and, turning a corner, felt her way up a short ladder-like stair, the monotonous wail of the child guiding her. With courtesy seldom observed under that roof, but due, she instinctively felt, to one evidently once accustomed to far different surroundings, she thumped, rather than rapped, at the door with her clenched fist. A momentary cessation of the child's cry was the only response.

Bess thumped again anything but gently. The child burst out afresh. "Ma-ma ! ma-ma !" it wailed, evidently in unsoothed terror.

"Oo conna ha' gone out, surely," said Bess, opening the door and peering in. At first she could make out nothing in the darkness ; but the

child's cry came from the floor. "Hush, hush, hush, my pretty!" she said, soothingly, feeling her way to the child and picking it gently up; "hush, then, hush, my lamb; Bess will na hurt thee." Soothed by the caressing tones, which were not altogether strange to her, and comforted by the tenderness with which Bess folded her to the ample bosom, in which a woman's heart, coarsened and hardened over, but not slain, was beating with unwonted strength that night, the child ceased its cry and nestled closely to her. "Theer, theer, then!" soothed Bess, patting and kissing it with a kind of hungry tenderness. "Theer, theer! but wheer's mammy, my lamb?"

"Ma-ma, ma-ma!" responded the child, leaning from her clasp, and stretching her arms downward to the floor.

"The Lord ha' mercy!" gasped Bess, as, following the suggestion, her eyes, growing accustomed to the gloom, made out Alice's figure prostrate there. "Oo isna dead, surely."

If not, she was very like it, for Bess's vigorous calls and shakes made no impression—but her

heart beat feebly. "Oo's swoonded wi' cowd and hoonger, and no wonder," was Bess's decision. "If aw could but get her to my warm room now, aw'd bring her to gradely theer."

To carry the child to her room, place her on the bed with injunctions to stay there till she brought mammy to her, to snatch up the candle and return to the side of the unconscious girl, was the work of a moment. In little more than another, Bess had laid Alice—a light weight in her practised arms—upon the bed too, fetched back the candle, and was doing her best to restore her.

The pungent smell of burnt feathers under her nose, the few drops of spirit that made their way through her closed teeth, and the more genial atmosphere of the room, soon had the desired effect. Alice sighed, shuddered, opened her eyes, and gazed around with a startled look. "Where am I?" she murmured confusedly—"And oh! where's Dot?"—with sudden terror, and a vain attempt to rise.

Bess put her gently back. "Tha'rt in Bess



“STAY THERE”

T. Pym.



Branker's room, and safe and welcoom as if tha wert i' a castle ; and theer's th' little un a-sittin' by the fire eatin' a butty. So tak' a drink o' this, and make thi moind easy."

But Alice turned shudderingly from the rank, raw spirit held to her lips. Distasteful to her when known only as an occasional indulgence, it had become hateful as the associate and cause of the misery and foulness around her. "If you would be so kind as to give me a cup of tea instead," she said pleadingly, her eye taking in Dot, in supreme content, and the steaming tea-pot on the hearth.

"Tha shalt ha' a coop o' tea, and a bit o' as good haddie as ever wur cooked to it. But tak' a soop o' coffee ; it'll put heart i' thee."

The advice was good under the circumstances.

Alice obeyed. The strong coffee sent the chilled blood coursing through the veins, and she was soon able to listen to Bess's explanations as to how she came there.

"You are very kind," she said, with a pathetic

quiver in her voice. "I never thought to have that to say to any one again."

"Ah, my lass, theer's mony a soft heart i' a rough buzzum. Aw've pitied thee mony's th' toime, and willed t' help thee. And mony's th' toime I've given t' choild a boite and a soop when tha wur out—Nay, I dinna spak' on it for thanks, but to show that aw meant koind by thee loike."

"Oh, forgive me!" sobbed Alice, remembering with compunction the disgust with which she had repelled Bess's tipsy advances. "I have not been used to—to life like this."

"It's easy t' see that, my lass. But coom, 'ave thi tea while 'ts hot. It's nobbut hoonger and heartache that ails thee, aw'm thinking. Aw'll soon cure thee o' one, but it'll tak' a better un nor me to rid thee o' t' other, aw'm afeared," said Bess, with a heavy sigh.

Right, Bess. But that better One was near, a guest at that table, spread for those who could not repay, though neither thou nor poor Alice guessed it

With rough, but real tenderness, Bess placed

her visitor on the best seat the room afforded,—the three-legged chair steadied by the packing case,—and piled a cracked plate with the best bits of the haddock and well-buttered bread. But poor Alice's appetite fell far short of her wishes and welcome. The food sickened her, and she swallowed with difficulty. But the hot, strong, well-sweetened tea, with the quality of the milk made up by the quantity, was delicious and refreshing as nectar to her feverish thirst and exhaustion.

With a consideration one would hardly have looked for, Bess left her undisturbed by talk or questioning. "Get thi baggin' i' quiet," she said. "We'n ha' a bit o' chat by-and-by, when tha's got a bit more heart i' thee." And she busied herself with feeding the delighted little one, who, her sorrows all forgotten in present delight, ate and drank, and cooed and prattled, in inarticulate baby fashion, and stretched out her little red toes in the welcome warmth, to Bess's infinite delight.

Bess had reaped a reward from a hard day's work ; she knew not that she would reap a richer

for the feast she spread for those helpless and hungry ones—that, of such deeds, it is said by the lips of Incarnate Truth, “They shall in no wise lose their reward.”

CHAPTER VI.

CONFIDENCES.

THE "bit o' chat" ensued in due course, beginning, as was natural, about the child. "Eh, but oo's a pretty un," said Bess, looking admiringly into the now rosy baby-face, "and loike 'ts mother as a farden to a wawpenny. What may 'ts name be now?"

"Dorothy."

"Dor-ror-thy? That's a foine name now, and one as aw never heerd on. What browt it to ye, loike?"

"It was my mother's," Alice answered, a look of exceeding pain crossing her brightened face. Then hastily, as if to turn the subject, "She is getting sleepy. Dot, my darling, kiss kind Mrs. Branker; kiss her good-night, and love her for your nice tea." The child, a bright little thing of

some sixteen or eighteen months, lifted its soft lips trustfully, and, as Bess bent to meet them, clasped its little arms tightly round her neck.

To Alice's amaze, Bess, as she strained her convulsively to her breast, burst into a passion of tears. The child was frightened, and stretched out her arms to her mother, who took her quickly.

"Theer, I've druv' her away," gasped Bess. "But, oh ! I conna help it ! Oh, my lamb, my lost, murdered lamb !" and she sobbed as if her heart would break, Alice looking on in pitiful and helpless wonder.

It was long before Bess could speak again. "Tha'llt wonder t' see *me* loike this," she said at last. "Jist wi' th' clip o' a choild's arms. But aw'd a little un once, mysen, and—and ——"

"And you lost it ?"

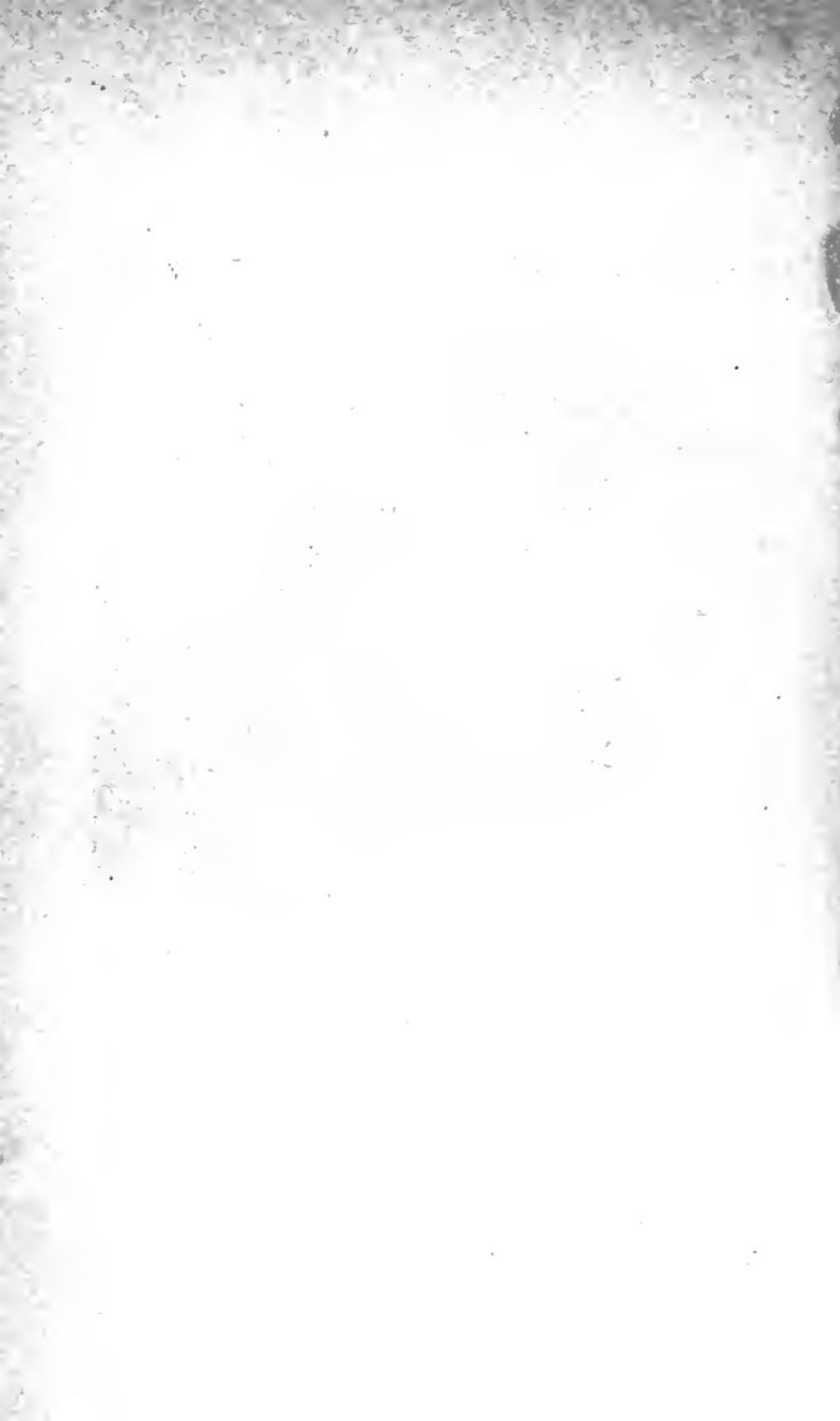
"Ay, aw lost it, th' little tender darlin', as wur all aw had to loove, all as ever looved me, and i' sich a way !

"Aw was work'us born and bred, tha sees," she continued, never loth to talk, and drawn on

:DOROTHY."



T.Pym.



by the sympathy in Alice's face, " and wur browt up hard and rough, wi' never a kiss nor a kind word, and never know'd kith nor kin. When aw wur old enough aw wur put to service, and a hard service it wur, wheer aw got nowt but my meat and my clothes, and little enough o' both. Aw left it after a while, and got another noan so mich better. Theer wur childer i' both, but they were nowt to me, but things as aw had to wash and dress, and keep out o' mischief if aw could. Aw didna know what loove was till my little darlin' coom.

" Aw married a chap aw met i' t' street when aw went o' my errands. Aw knew nowt on him, but oo said oo wur gettin' a good wage—and so oo wur—but oo wur as good un at spendin' as at gettin'—and aw thowt 'twould be a foine thing to be my own missus. Aw meant well by him, and by mysen too, though. But aw found aw'd got out o' t' froyin'-pan into t' foire—got hard blows wheer aw'd only had hard words afore, and was often welley clemmed when Sam was on t' spree — till aw got work i' a mill and kep' mysen.

"But i' toime my little darlin' wur born, and wi' her my heart seemed t' wakken oop loike, and loife, hard as it wur, t' get worth livin'. Aw needna tell *thee* what oo was to me, tha'st had a different bringin' oop; but aw con see as yon choildt's all th' world to thee *now*, so tha'llt know what my little Nell wur to me. Eh-h-h, oo wur a bonnie un, wi' oiyes loike forget-me-nots, and sich pretty winnin' ways, aw'd a give my loife, willin', any day for her. But t' fayther, *he* thowt nowt on her, and got into worse ways, playin' by weeks together, and gettin' in wi' a lot o' burglar chaps. Aw could get no brass out o' *him*, and aw couldna leave my darlin' to work i' the mill, so aw took to hawkin' a bit o' foine days, carryin' t' choildt and t' basket. But it wur hard work, and before long aw got a little cart as aw could push along wi' her and my stoof. But one neet him and me had words because aw wouldn't turn oop t' brass aw'd earned, and he kicked t' cart to pieces, and give me two black eyes i' th' bargain. Aw wur ashamed to face t' foak aw served for a day or two, but at last aw'd spent all

aw had, and wur out o' coals, and t' choildt wur cowd and hoongry, and so aw wur forced t' turn out. 'T wur jist sich a day as this, pouring o' rain and th' wind loike oice, and t' choild a wheezin' and coughin', so thinks oi, it'll do her less harm to croi a bit than to go out i' th' wet. So aw lapped her oop well, and fastened her down i' th' bed, so as oo couldn't get out, and covered her oop, and went my way.

"Aw coom'd back as soon as aw'd made a shil-lin' or so, for my moind was ill at ease. Somehow aw seemed to hear her croi, croi, croying and calling, 'Mammy,' a' th' toime. But aw wur too late! *Oo'd* coom in, blind drunk, and flung hisser on t' bed ——"

"Not on the child!" gasped Alice, as Bess paused, unable to proceed.

"Ay, on t' choild," was the sobbed-out answer; "reet o' top o' her. Aw chucked him off as if oo'd been a feather, but it wur to late, *so* wur crooshed and dead—dead and crooshed, my pretty darlin'."

"Oh, poor thing, poor thing!" exclaimed Alice,

leaning forward, and touching the coarse red hand on Bess's knee. "What *did* you do?"

Bess raised her face with a strange look on it. "*Aw did nowt to him!*" she said. "Aw've wondered ever sin', but aw did nowt to him. Theer's some foak as says as theer's One above as knows all as happens to us poor foak and keeps us out o' harm. It doan't look mich loike it i' general, but whenever aw think as aw did not kill him as he lay a helpless log on t' floor, and a knife o' th' table by me, aw think theer must be—aw think theer must be, lass!"

"Certainly God knows, and I suppose He *cares*," said Alice slowly, a rush of many thoughts coming into a mind far less ignorant, but scarcely more spiritually enlightened, than Bess's.

"Well, *soommat* held my hand, and aw didna tooch him. But aw couldna bear t' soight o' him after. As soon as my little darlin' wur buried, aw tramped it here by neet that he shouldna foind out wheer aw'd gone. And soon after oo got ketched a-breakin' into a shop, and got fourteen year, and aw've never heerd on him sin'."

She heaved a heavy sigh, and taking up the spirit bottle poured herself out a dram.

"It's been my only friend," she said, deprecating Alice's look of dread and disgust. "A bad un, happen, but th' only one aw could pick up wi' as could coomfort me. I'd never took mich afore, but when aw went my ways wi' that wailin' croi o' 'Mammy, mammy,' and its end i' a smotherin' scream i' my ears as plain as if aw'd been theer to hear, it giv' me sleep, and it giv' me heart as nowt else aw know'd on could ha' done, and by its help aw've got on pretty gradely loike, and am as jolly as most foak i' general. Theer, my lass, that is moi story; and now let's hear thoine. Gi' me th' choild th' whoile though; it'll ease thy poor arms and my heart."

And Alice, her heart opened by sympathy and kindness, to her surprise found herself *glad* to pour out to the coarse, drunken hawker, from whom she had but a few hours ago shrunk in loathing, the tale of sin and wrong and sorrow which had never before passed her lips.

It was listened to with rough, but most true and

kindly, sympathy. "Eh, my poor lass, but tha'st been hardly done by," was Bess's final comment, as Alice, stopping short at the terrible resolve of the afternoon, paused. "And tha doesna know wheer *oo* is now?"

"I do not know, and I do not care. I would rather die than touch one penny from him or his," said Alice, divining Bess's thoughts.

"But tha must have some kin that could help thee, sure?"

Alice shook her head. "I know of none; I was an only child," she answered. "No, I have no one to help me. We must die, Dot and I," she murmured, as if to herself.

"Nay, nay," said Bess cheerily. "Doan't thee say that. Theer's places for sick foak as can't help themselves."

"There's the workhouse, where they would take Dot from me and make her what—and bring her up as you were brought up, Mrs. Branker. Better know her dead and safe—dead and safe," interrupted Alice with fierce vehemence.

"Well, well," said Bess soothingly. "But

till ye get stronger a bit, it moightn't be so bad, ye know."

"I shall never get stronger, Mrs. Branker. I'm dying—I feel, I know it. And I think I had better take Dot with me."

"Mercy on us! What does tha mean?" asked Bess in alarm.

"Nothing, nothing," said Alice hastily, "only I can't bear to think what will become of Dot when I am gone," and closing her eyes with a shudder as from some terrible sight, she leaned her head wearily against the dingy wall.

"Tha'rt wore out, poor lass," said Bess compassionately, "what wi' th' walk, and th' storm, and Sall Wicks's tongue. Eh, oo's a hard un, but aw'm a match for her! and oo'll noan turn thee and th' choildt i' th' street whoile Bess Branker's a roof over *her* yed. Moind that, my lass. Tha coom here i' th' mornin', if oo's fur turnin' thee out whoile aw'm at t' market, and stay till tha con foind a better friend and shelter. Tha'rt koindly welcoom."

There could be no doubt of that. The coarse

face was beaming with kindness ; the rough speech instinct with feeling.

It was now Alice's turn to burst into a passion of tears. "Then I need not do it to-night !" she cried. "Oh, God bless you ! God bless you ! You don't know what you have saved me from !" and flinging herself upon her knees, and clasping her arms round Bess and the sleeping Dot, she sobbed forth a confession of her dreadful purpose.

CHAPTER VII.

BESS BRANKER GIVES AN OPINION.

"E H-H-H, my lass," Bess said, when Alice had finished, stroking the bowed dark head with as tender a touch as jewelled fingers could have given. "Eh, my lass, but aw'm glad aw coomed when Sall wur jawin' thee, or aw'd ha' knowed nowt about it."

"God sent you!" said Alice, with strong and sudden conviction.

"Dost think so?" queried Bess in an awed tone. "Beloike, if 't wur Him as held my hond fr' Sam. But nay, lass, He'd ne'er mak' use o' an owd sinner loike me!"

"Not to help a sinner like me?" rejoined Alice, with new and strange humility. "Oh, Bess, I'm worse, a thousand times, than you! *I* sinned

against love, *such* love ! Oh, father ! oh, mother ! ”
and she hid her face with a long wailing moan.

“They must be dead,” she said, looking up after a time, “they loved me so, they *must* have forgiven me—ungrateful, cruel, wicked as I had been—if they had read my letter, and knew my need and misery ; don’t you think so, Bess ?”

“Ay, lass,” Bess answered slowly, as though working out a problem in her mind. “They mun ha’ forgiv’ thee, if th’ pairent’s heart i’ them wur owt loike th’ mother’s heart i’ *me*. If my Nell had growed up bad and cruel, aw’d ha’ forgiv’ and looved her through’t all, aw know aw should. And if oo had trampled o’ mi loove and forgiveness a score o’ toimes, aw’d ha’ been as ready to forgive and forget th’ moment oo said : ‘Aw’n sorry, mother.’ Ay, and before, if aw knowed her i’ need or sorrow. Aw know aw should ; there’s that here as tells me.” And she laid her hand upon her heart. “But, my lass, aw’m thinkin’ tha didna wrote but once. Happen they ne’er got th’ letter !”

A sudden flash of hope lit Alice’s woe-worn

face, but it faded swiftly into the blankness of despair, as she said, gaspingly, "They *must*, oh, they *must*! It's an out-of-the-way place, and I was afraid, and took such care, and posted it myself. Besides, I should have had it back. I stayed on, waiting, waiting, though the lodgings were so dear,—it was in Embden Street, London Road,—for full a month, and called and asked. Oh yes—they—some one at least must have had it."

"Well, aw don't know mich about letters, mysen, never had one i' my loife, or writ one, tha may be sure. But aw'm thinkin' aw'd wroite again, if aw wur thee. Soommat *moight* ha' happened, things does get lost i' queer ways, and happen t' owd foak are breakin' their hearts for news o' thee all th' toime tha'rt thinkin' um hard, or dead."

Alice shook her head, though a gleam of hope came back into her sad eyes.

"Eh, but aw would," persisted Bess. "Aw'll bring thee a bit o' papper, and stamp and a', when aw coom whoam to-morrow, and tha shall

wroite, and mak' thysen welcoom to boite and soop and shelter till t' answer cooms. So now lay thee down, my lass, on yon bed i' th' warm, and rest thee a bit. Tha'rt welly wored out."

Yes, Alice was nearly worn out, more nearly than Bess thought, and gladly complied. "Theer," said Bess, as she laid the sleeping child in her eagerly out-stretched arms. "Tha sleep till mornin' if tha con. Aw con sleep on t' floore a' reet, does it often, by chice."

True, yet untrue, poor uncared-for, generous Bess; for the choice is rather a necessity and a too-frequent one.

Bess washed up the cups and saucers she had borrowed, piled more coal on the fire, and sat down. Alice lay motionless, apparently asleep, and Bess soon grew very weary of the stillness and silence, and of the freshly-wakened pain at her heart. But by the help of a pull or two at the spirit bottle she bore it for an hour or so, listening more and more longingly to the sounds of rough merriment rising from the crowded kitchen below. Like too many of the world's mourners,

she knew of no better balm for sorrow than the brief forgetfulness excitement brings; no better stimulant for the slowly-beating, heavy-laden heart than that which the intoxicating cup contains. No one had told her of a love that passeth knowledge, divine, and yet human, entering with the keen, deep sympathy of experience into every trial of the earthly life it has stooped to share, into every pang of the nature it has worn; taking the sting from every sorrow, the canker from every care. No one had even told her of a God that cared for and pardoned and saved the helpless and sorrowful. From the services she attended in her youth at the workhouse she had only brought away a vague idea of a Great and Dreadful Being above, Whose hand was inexorably against sin and the sinful. Since those days she had never entered a place of worship, and though from time to time she had met, as she said, "foak who believed as there was One above as knew all as happened, and kep' em out o' harm," no man had cared for her soul, and told her there was a Father, a Saviour, a heaven for her—poor sinful,

sorrowful, roystering Bess Branker ! Is it wonder, therefore, that as she sat there, heavy-hearted and dull, the familiar sounds from below should lure her like a spell ?

"Aw may as well go down a bit," she said at last. "Sall 'll be wanting her pots, happen." And gathering them together, she went, stopping as she passed to look at her sleeping guests.

The child's face was hidden, but the flickering firelight played full on the mother's, revealing the chiselled delicacy of the worn features, the graceful sweep of the long curled lashes, the sweet set of the lips, over which, as Bess looked, a faint smile quivered.

"Oo's dreamin', poor thing," was her comment. "Eh, but oo's been a gradely lass, and to think oo should come to this ! And aw conna think her foak is dead—sorrow don't kill that easy. Na-ay, soommat went wrong wi' t' letter, and theer's better days nor she thinks i' store fur her, aw'm thinkin'."

Ah, there were, and near at hand !

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN.

A LITTLE longer Alice slept, dreaming pleasant dreams it seemed, for smiles played ever and anon around the lips to which they had so long been strangers. But suddenly she woke with a start, and, raising herself upon her elbow, gazed around with a wild, terrified look, then sank back with a groan of anguish. "A dream! only a dream! Would God I had never woken!" she cried, and burst into a passion of tears.

Blessed tears! gift of God's love to overburdened nature, melting in their flow the ice of hardness and despair, softening the heart-soil bound with sorrow's frost. Those Alice had shed on Bess's knee had brought in their train humility, penitence, and yearnings which had awoke long-banished memories in her breast—memories which,

lapsing into dreams, had borne her back beyond the gulf which yawned between, to the old days and ways, and dear, familiar scenes and faces. Once more on her—a fair light-hearted girl—a Sabbath morning had dawned in her old chamber in the farm upon the hill. Once more she had fed her cooing doves, and trod the fragrant garden-paths, culling, in happy wont, one bouquet for her breast, another to lay upon the lavender-scented kerchief that enfolded her mother's prayer-book. Once more she had tripped lightly by her parents' side across the breezy upland fields, joining with neighbours by the way; turning to hasten the gossips, as the last bell from the old grey tower pealed forth its mellow "Come! Come! Come!" Once more she had passed the churchyard path, and flung smiles and glances to the loiterers round; once more, as the bell's last stroke fell, she had entered the cool, solemn shadow of the church, and heard, amidst the hush that followed tramp of feet and creak of doors, the well-known words: "I will arise, and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned—"

And then suddenly she had wakened to find herself a sad and sick and beggared outcast in Bess Branker's squalid room !

Oh, bitter, bitter wakening ! "Would God I had never woke !" Alice cried. "Would God that I might die !" cried one of old, when beside him stood, unseen, God's angel with provision for an unknown journey near, a journey great and long —even unto the mount of God.

Before Alice, too, lay that journey ; beside her, too, stood God's angel. For as she wept the pride and bitterness that had steeled her heart so long broke down, and love and grief and penitence swept over it like a flood. "I have sinned ! I have sinned !" was her soul's deep cry, and still softly, sweetly, strangely, like a voice of mighty tone, the church-bell pealed its "Come ! Come ! Come !" in her ears, and the words, "I will arise, and go to my Father," rung like sweetest music through her soul.

At first it was but of earthly love and pardon she thought. The "Come ! Come ! Come !" seemed but an earthly parent's ca'l ; her "I will arise"

was of filial penitence alone. Hope and trust sprang up in her heart, and for a while she lay, dreamy and content, drawing hope for the dreary present and dreaded future from sweet memories of the love-lit past.

But suddenly—how roused she could not tell—she became conscious that a strange numb torpor was stealing over her—that a pressure, as of a cold and heavy hand, was on her breast—*Death's?* Could it be ?

Could it be ? and she alone, alone, and—now her wakened spirit felt—guilty and unprepared ? She started up in terror, and clasped her chill hands wildly, and gazed around in terrified appeal. In vain ; not even Bess was there ! Then from her pale lips broke Nature's instinctive cry—“Help ! help me, O my God !”

That was not in vain. Ere uttered God's answering messenger had been sent ; no bright-robed angel, but a poor crippled sinner, who loved—because forgiven—much.

The fire burnt hollow, fell together, and sent a steady sheet of flame that lit up every corner

of the small room. By its light Alice, turning yearningly to look at Dot, saw something lying on the bed beside her. It was the card the crippled woman had given her, forgotten until then. She took it up at first listlessly, but, as she unfolded the wrappings, the woman's earnest words and tones came back to her, and she paused in her task. "There's One that cares, and One that helps," the cripple had said. And had she not spoken truth? Had God not sent Bess to minister to her needs, to save her from her awful purpose, to win her to hope and penitence by kindness? Yes, she had spoken truth. And she had bidden her take Him who had spoken the words upon that card at *His* word, and be helped as she had been. What were the words?—such as would help her now? Made eager by the thought, she shook off the wrappings, and read, printed in fair, clear characters:—

"Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

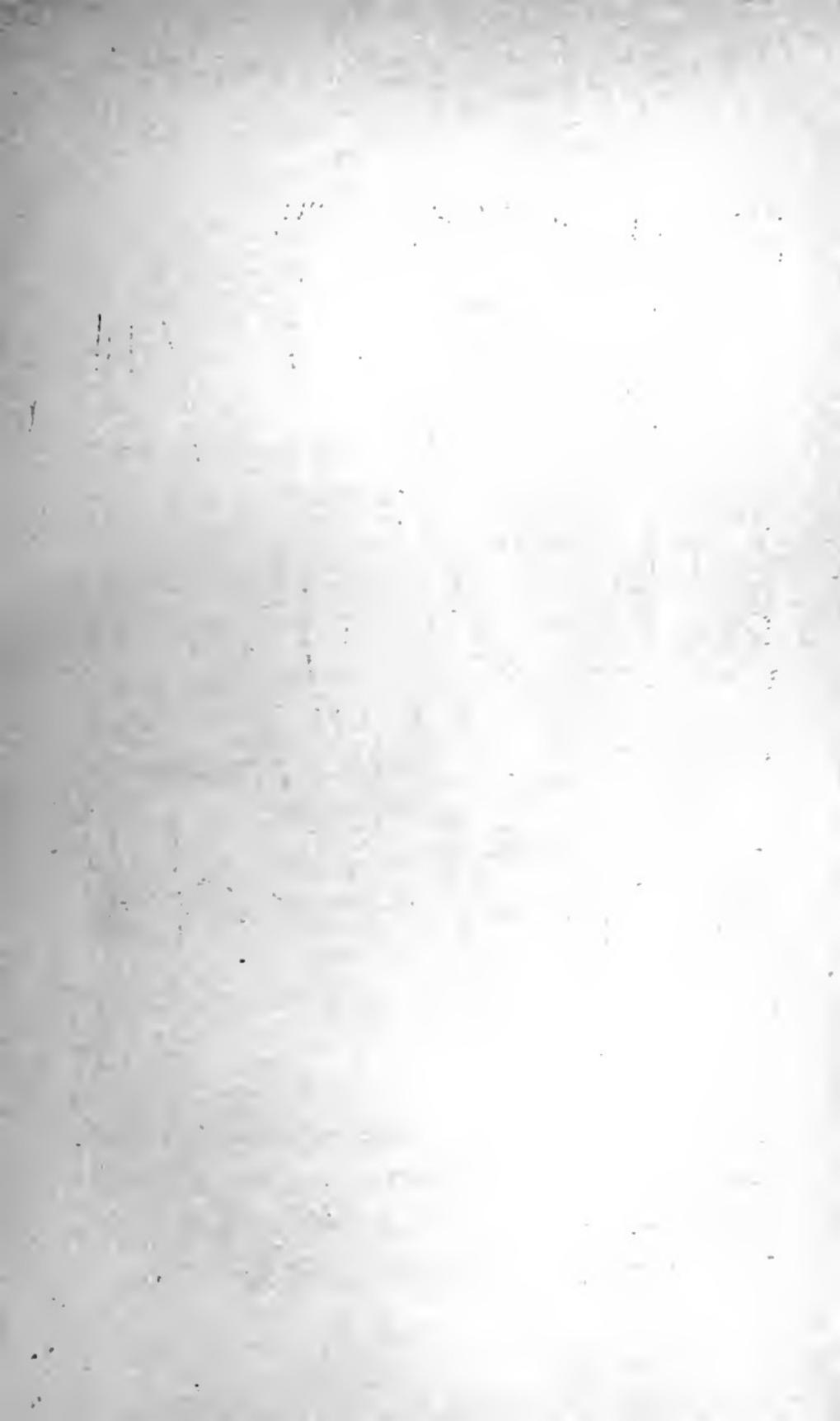
"Him that cometh unto Me, I will in nowise cast out".

For—

"The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Again and again, and yet again, she read it; and then she sat, her dark eyes wide and fixed, her face wearing the look of one that listens. And she was listening—listening to One whose office it is to bring to remembrance long-forgotten things; to bring to life seeds sown in faith and prayer. He spoke to her in the remembered words and tones of one on whose lips the dust of death had long lain,—the vicar's gentle daughter,—who, in the days of Alice's early girlhood, had sought, earnestly and prayerfully, but vainly it had seemed, to win for Christ the girls of her Sabbath class, especially the fair and winning and giddy Alice.

But over the listening face a dim grey shadow was stealing, on the pale brow cold drops were breaking forth. Alice put up her hand, slowly, feebly—felt them. "It is coming," she whispered, and with a great effort drew her sleeping child to her breast, and covered her with kisses. "Oh,



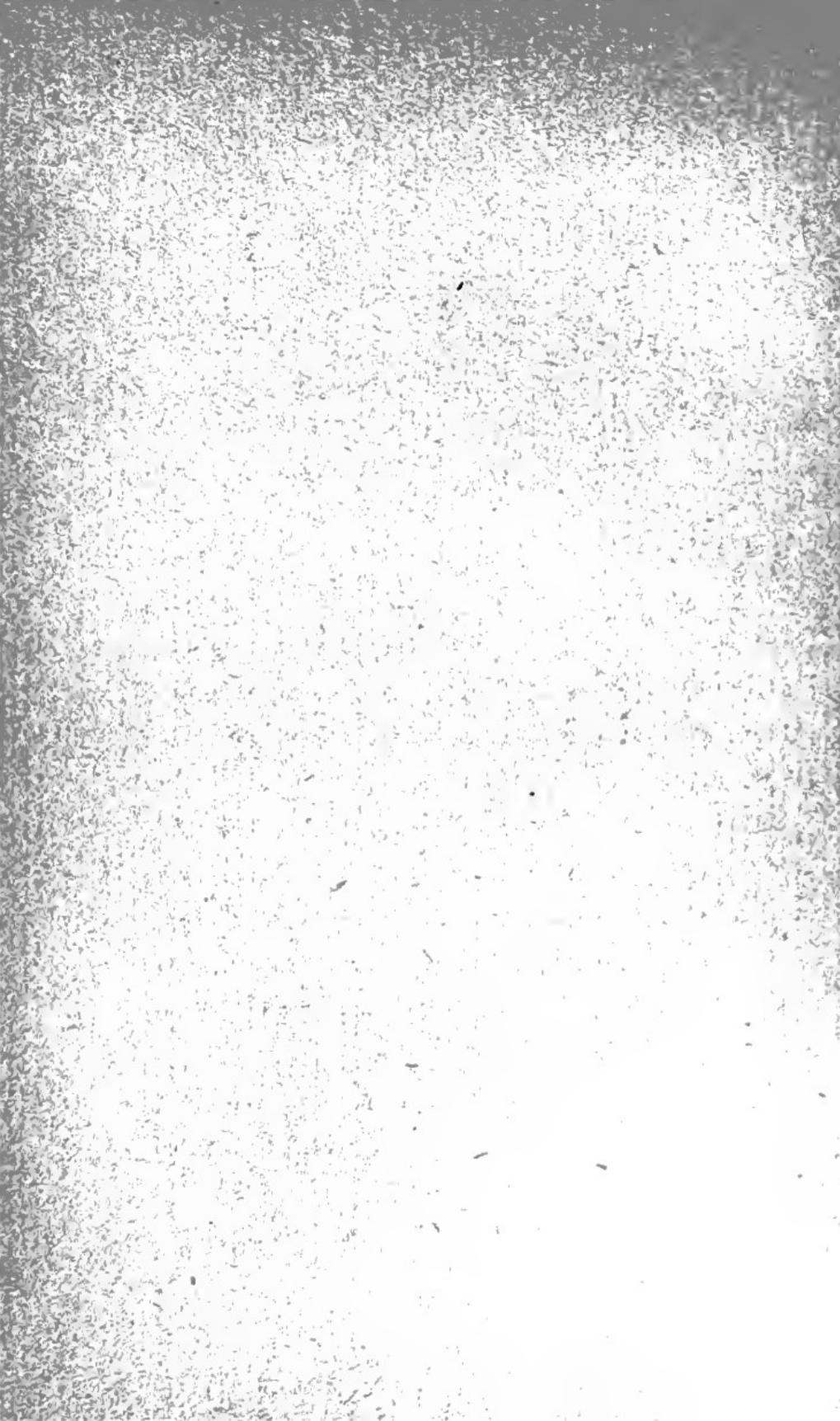


my Dot, my darling, my darling! I'm going, going for ever!" she cried. The child half opened her eyes, smiled happily, nestled closer and slept on, all unconscious of the struggle in the heaving breast that pillow'd her.

For a few moments, exhausted with the effort she had made, Alice rested her face upon the child's. Then she raised it—greyer and sharper, but with the listening look again upon it.

Suddenly a bright smile lit it. "Come! Come! Come!" she repeated, as though echoing a call she heard. "Yes, yes; 'I will arise, and go to my Father.' Oh yes! oh yes!" And suiting the action to the word, she laid Dot tenderly down, rose from the bed, sank on her knees beside it, and lifted a face radiant with trust and hope. "I come, I come!" she gasped. "Lord, I come; I take Thee at Thy word. And Dot! and Dot!" she murmured, stretching her feeble arm across the child. "And Dot! and Dot!"

And then her head sank wearily and restfully, and all was still.



CHAPTER IX.

NO NAME.

WHEN Bess returned, only a few red dust-choked embers remained of the glowing fire she had left. There had been unwonted excitement below, ending in a free fight and a police raid, and in enjoyment of it Bess had been drawn into forgetfulness of her guests and of her unspoken resolution to keep on "the square," as she phrased it. There was nothing in the darkness and stillness of the room to break that forgetfulness, and too heavy with drink to think of striking a light or undressing, she groped her way stupidly to the bed. But as she groped her hand touched something still and very cold—something which thrilled her drink-numbed nerves, and cleared her clouded brain like an electric shock—a face, a dead, cold face!

Recoiling in a sudden panic of terror, she flung open the door, and shrieked for help and light. Half-a-dozen half-dressed, half-topsy creatures responded, and crowded the dark room and passage, but no one had presence of mind to strike a light till Mrs. Wicks herself appeared, storming and fuming, and candle in hand.

Its light showed Alice, kneeling still, but dead and cold, her one arm stretched across the child, her white face as peaceful in its rest as the sleeping baby one it all but touched.

A strange, a sad, a pitiful sight, which for a moment awed the rude, hardened beings that gazed on it. Then broke forth question and comment from some; others, disappointed of the horrors they had looked for, slunk away.

Bess stood like one stunned, till some one remarked, "T' choildt 'll go to t' workus." She came forward then. "Nay," she said, "not whoile aw've boite and soop to give it, and aw'll starve mysen afore it shall want."

"Whoi, Bess, what's coom to thee?" was the general exclamation.

"My heart, aw'm thinkin', as wur buried i' my Nelly's grave," was the wonder-evoking reply, as she took up the child—which, disturbed by the light and voices, half woke with a frightened cry of "Ma-ma"—and pressed her closely to her breast.

"Tha'rt full o' drink, Bess," said a woman, with a laugh that sounded fiendish in that still, solemn presence. "Tha'llt sing another song i' t' mornin'!"

"Tha says!" said Bess, with infinite contempt. "But coom! theer's bin jawin' enough. Lift the poor lass upo' th' bed. Aw promised to shelter her till oo found a better whoam, and aw'll be as good as my word."

"Oo's found it now, by t' look of oo's face," said a woman, as they laid the poor limp form upon the bed. "Oo looks so restful and smoilin' loike."

"Happen," said Bess. "Eh, poor thing! but aw little thowt oo wur so near't, or aw wouldna ha' left her for a' th' drink and coompany i' th' world. Aw wouldn't for sure!" The shock had

thoroughly sobered her, and her better feelings were in force again.

"Who was her, Bess? Aw've seed her oft, but oo seemed proud and skeared loike, and aw let her be."

"Ay, oo'd seen better days, poor lass, as ony one moight see, and coom through shame and sorrow," exclaimed Bess.

"But wheer did her coom from, and what was her name?" persisted the questioner.

"Aw never axed her!" Bess gasped in dismay. "Aw never axed her! Her foak wur farmers, and well-to-do, oo said, and aw thowt—aw thowt—but it's no use now, t' parish mun bury *her*, and aw'll do t' best aw con for t' choildt. Dost hear, poor lass?" she said, bending over the unconscious sleeper. "Dost hear? Aw'll do t' best aw con for t' choildt. Eh-h-h, oo conna hear; but" (and she looked round with earnest solemnity) "theer's One as does, lasses, theer's One as does, and happen He'll tell her!"

A few hours more, and there was borne to a pauper's grave a woman—name unknown.

CHAPTER X.

BESS AND DOT.

BESS'S regret for her inadvertence in not ascertaining the name of the poor girl she had sheltered was superficial and short-lived. Reflection convinced her that were the once fond parents living, as she fully believed them to be, and made aware of their grand-child's existence, they would at one claim her ; and against such an issue her hungry heart protested with all its force. For the child—too young to miss her mother much or long, and recognising in Bess's a familiar face and voice, associated in her little memory with food and comfort and kindness—clung to and caressed her, and satisfied her starved-down, but not destroyed, cravings for something on which to expend the naturally great love-power of her heart, almost as her own child had done.

And if the lot to which her adopted motherhood bound the little one was mean and hard and coarse, it saved her from the one her own poor mother had dreaded so—the one that had been Bess's own, compared to which that she planned for Dot was luxury itself in her eyes.

So disregarding alike the scoffs and sneers of her associates, and the self-denial the charge entailed, she took the little nameless waif to her hearth and her heart, and did her best by her, as she had vowed to her dead mother, according to her lights, clothing her warmly, feeding her plentifully in the main,—though, like all children of her class, Dot had her hard times,—and loving her heartily.

The story of the child's origin was soon lost in the constant changes of that migratory household. By the time little Dot Branker could hold her own with the children in the court, she was universally thought to be what she seemed—the hawker's only and petted child.

Rough and hard, and uncongenial as a childhood spent amidst squalor and misery must be,

the little one was not unhappy. Her temper, though high and passionate when roused, was sweet and sunny, and use made it little hardship to her to be locked for hours in a dreary and fireless room. A cheap toy or two, a few bits of broken china and bright-coloured rags, and the hope of Bess's return, kept her amused and happy. When "mammy" was at home she had all her little heart had learned to covet.

With instinctive faithfulness to an ungiven charge, Bess sought to keep her as much as possible apart from the rough little wretches with whom the court was thronged. "T' poor lass wudna ha' loiked it," she said to herself, respecting that and many another point affecting Dot. But of course a time came when the lively, active child could not be kept, without force or cruelty, in one narrow room, and Bess's rounds covered far too much ground for such little feet to tread.

So Dot had to take her chance of contamination by example. She suffered wonderfully little. Doubtless the blood in her veins told; the heritage

of generations of refinement and uprightness. All untaught and untrained as she was, she shrank from coarseness and profanity, and queened it over her rude companions. Her speech was strangely pure, so far as tone and accent went; her words and phrases were naturally those of the prevailing dialect. She had inherited her mother's delicate and fatal beauty—the finely-cut features, the oval face, the deep grey eyes that looked black under the shadow of the long curled lashes, the dark silky hair, were such as coarse clothing and unkempt squalor might impair, but not destroy. She was slightly built and small for her years, but healthy, struggling through the various ailments of childhood with the least possible trouble to herself and Bess.

As for Bess, she was a happier woman than she had ever been, except during the brief life of her ill-fated little Nell—ay, and a better one too. She had an interest in life, a motive for well-doing. Something better than mere rest and shelter, and coarse conviviality, awaited her at the end of a long day's toil—the loving light of bright child-

eyes, the clinging clasp of soft child-arms, the cheery music of sweet child-prattle !

The necessity of lighting a fire to warm the child, and the danger of leaving her alone with it,—the shock of Nell's fate having left Bess more fearful of danger to her darling than is usual with her class,—weaned her in a great measure from the kitchen, with its debasing excitements and incitements ; and the thought of some pleasure or comfort or necessity for Dot often and often turned her hesitating steps from the gin-shop's tempting promise of "heartening," when she was weary with way or weather, or disheartened with fruitless toil. And pitiful memory of poor Alice, intensified by the remorse she ever felt at having left her to die alone, kept a soft spot in her heart towards the sick and the destitute, evidenced in many a gift bestowed and night's shelter given.

She taught Dot, therefore, rather by example than precept, two things—to love and to pity. Noble lessons, unlearned by many a young heart whose outward surroundings are all that could be desired.

Use of her room as a living place developed the dormant womanly instincts of Bess's breast. She cleaned it now and then, picked up some cheap oddments of furniture, and actually had the window glazed, half in charity to a sick itinerant glazier, half in solicitude for Dot's comfort and health. As Dot grew older she taught her, as best she could, to clean and cook and sew, reviving for her benefit the almost forgotten lore of her serving-days. Dot was an apt scholar, her double heritage of patrician taste and yeoman industry standing her in good stead; and while yet a mite of a child, she not only kept the room in such order that it was like an oasis in the squalor around, but would have a bright fire and the kettle singing on Bess's return.

This was Dot's only education. Her days were spent, when the weather was fair, playing in the court, or rambling about the adjacent streets, or, as a great treat, going with Bess upon her rounds —her evenings in sitting, happy in "mother's" companionship, on the doorstep or by the fireside.

Sundays were her red-letter days, because mother was always at home all day ; and in sunny weather they often brought the greatest delight of her life—a ramble in the park, or, better still, a ride outside a 'bus into the country, which to Dot seemed paradise.

She never dreamed she was other than Bess's child. Mrs. Wicks was dead, and Bess could never find in her heart to tell her, though her conscience sometimes smote her when she thought of the true mother, dead and unknown to the child she had so fondly loved. "Aw sh'dna ha' loiked my Nell to ha' growded up and knowed nowt o' me, if aw'd doied i'stead o' her," she would say to herself as she thought of this—she often did think of it in these days of her anxious love and solicitude for her foster-child. If Dot was to her what her own moon-faced, blue-eyed, buried baby might have become, she was not what she was, and nothing could oust her Nelly from her memorial shrine in her mother's faithful heart. But then she would tell herself that Dot was too young to understand the bitter truth

which one day she must tell her, and that it was better to wait a bit. And ever the task, like all postponed duties, grew to seem harder and less imperative.

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT ANOTHER DECEMBER BROUGHT.

SO years passed on. Baby Dot had become a slim, thin, sallow-cheeked child of ten or eleven ; Bess,—what with toil and exposure, and her evil habit, kept in bounds, but far from abandoned,—a woman old before her time. They still lived in the old room, furnished with some degree of comfort now—the time, of which they had talked by the hour, when they would be able to go and live in one of the pretty cottages which so took Dot's fancy in the suburban villages they visited in their Sunday rides (it was curious how hereditary instincts asserted themselves in the child, in her yearnings for pure air and country pursuits and pleasures), and start a little shop with Bess's savings, and rear ducks and chickens for sale, never came. Bess had the easy-going

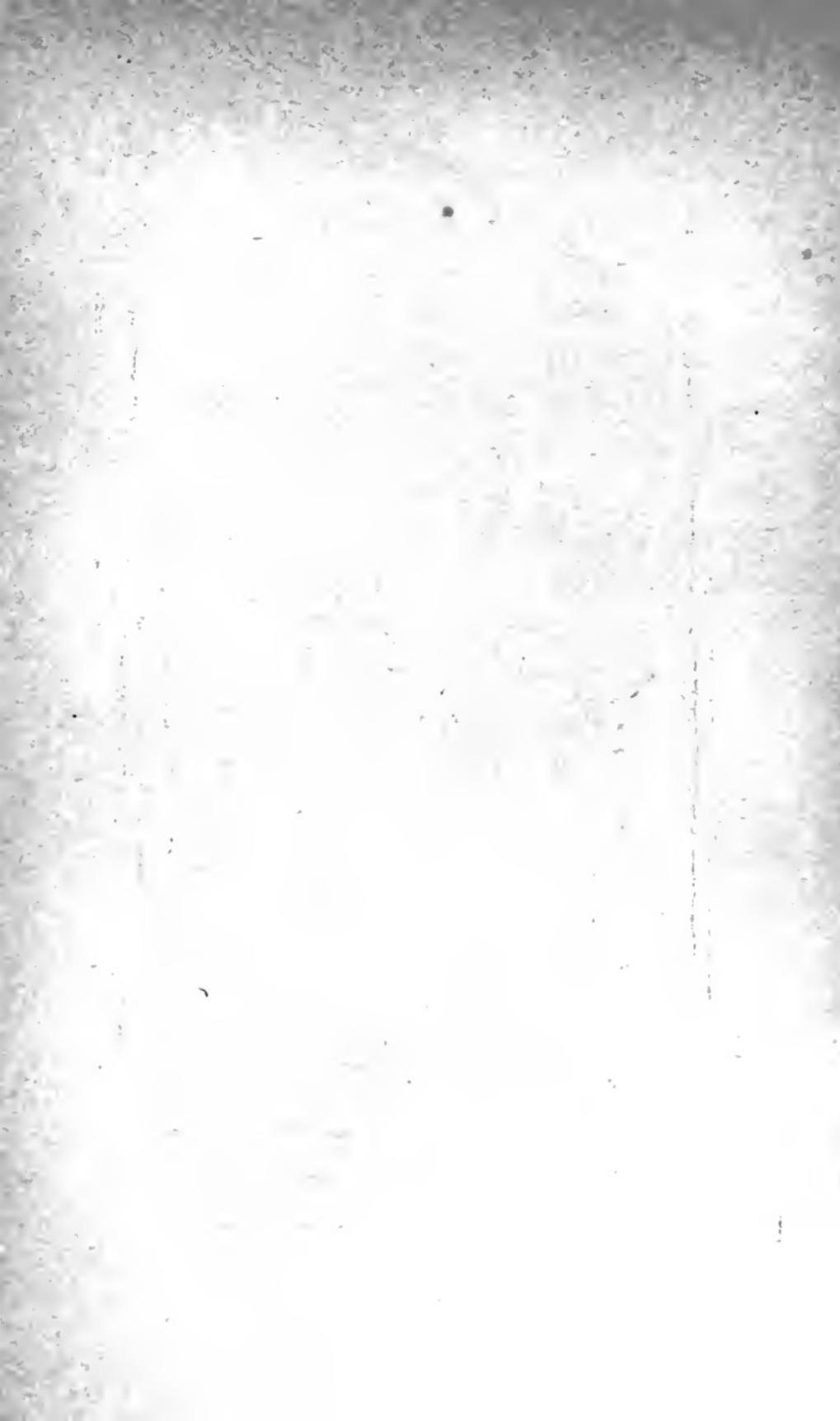
unthrift of her class—when money was plentiful she spent it lavishly, both upon herself and others ; and the hard times, either of sickness or of bad trade, which from time to time overtook them, were seldom adequately provided for.

So in their cheery and loving content with each other and their lot, and their ignorance of better things, Bess and Dot rubbed on from day to day, and year to year, taking the rough with the smooth, making the best of things, and feeding on hopes destined never to be realised. For a shock —sudden and terrible, and unexpected as an earthquake's—came upon them, and changed the whole face of their lives.

It came upon them on a stormy December day, just such an one as gave Dot to Bess, as many and many a time Bess remembered, as she watched the little, light figure trip up the steps and knock at the doors, so saving her many a useless strain of her poor rheumatic limbs. Bess had been ailing of late : a heavy cold, caught in an early November fog, had left her weak and with a harassing cough, besides aggravating the rheu-

• KNOCK.





matism from which she had long suffered. It had become almost a habit for Dot to accompany her ; her help, and still more, her bright loving companionship cheered Bess through many a long hour of pain and weariness, and saved her from too frequent recourse to her false friend—the spirit bottle.

It was a mark of the loyalty of the woman's nature that, remembering Alice's horror of them, Bess had never offered or suffered Dot to touch intoxicants, even teaching her to regard them as bad friends, and rarely indulging in them in her presence. Their effects upon herself, too often apparent in coarsened behaviour, stupidity, and heavy sleep, though never in harshness, commended such teaching to the child, who, besides, was shrewd enough to see in them the bar to the fulfilment of their life-dream.

Bess was reaping the sure reward, promised by lips that cannot deceive, to such as show kindness to those that "cannot repay." But for the board spread, and the shelter offered to the homeless and destitute stranger that night so long ago Bess,

confirmed in her evil habits, might, ere then, have become a wretched, degraded creature, or lain in a drunkard's grave—who can tell ?

Perhaps some such thoughts, in crude and untaught guise, passed through Bess's mind as she watched Dot with tear-dimmed eyes that day, murmuring as she did so many and many a time, "My little blessin' ! It mun be true what yon poor dead lass said—summat better nor luck nor weather sent me in early yon day."

"We can go home now, mother," said Dot, turning, bright-eyed and jubilant, from a door where a successful sale had been effected. "The kippers and haddies will be none the worse by to-morrow, and that little cut o' cod 'll just make us a nice broil for tea, and help ye to eat a bit—won't it, mother ? "

"Always thinkin' o' me," answered Bess fondly. "Ay, my blessin', we'll go whoam. Aw'm chilled to th' heart, and every bone o' my body werches."

"Never mind, mother, we'll soon have a good fire, and a nice hot cup o' tea 'll set ye to rights. Ugh-gh-gh!"—with an irrepressible shiver, as

they turned a corner and faced the blast. "But won't it be cosy? Here's a 'bus just handy, mother. You jump in with th' baskets, and I'll race ye for first. It'll warm me;" and without waiting for consent Dot started off, making such good use of her feet that she kept the 'bus in sight a great part of the way, then making a short cut, was in time to help Bess and the baskets out.

"Cheer up, mother, we'll be home in a jiffey now," she panted. "The fire 'll be in, I'm thinking, and the kettle 'll boil in no time. *Won't* a cup o' hot tea be nice and warmin'?"

"Ay," answered Bess, rather drearily, looking longingly at the door of a vault, from which the reek of spirits came temptingly. Had she been alone she would have entered without hesitation. Perhaps thought of that pitfall in the way had given wings to Dot's feet. If so, she had her reward. Bess passed on. "Ay, lass, it will," she repeated. "And aw never felt moor i' want o' a bit o' coomfort i' my loife."

"Oh! we'll have it, mother," said Dot gleefully. "We've plenty of coals and tea, and a bit o' fish

fit for the Queen, and we'll get a fresh loaf and a bit of butter and sugar as we pass—why, we shall have quite a feast," and she danced gaily along, oblivious of wet and cold and fatigue, Bess following painfully, but with brightened face.

Alas, poor Dot! poor Bess! there was neither feast nor comfort for you that night.

They reached home at last, and paused in the passage to shake off the wet from their dripping clothes, Bess coughing badly. At that moment a boy, a stranger to Dot and Bess, came down the stairs. He was tall and thin, ragged, and barefoot, but his face was open and pleasant—the blue eyes that gleamed from under a mighty shock of dingy fair hair were singularly clear and keen, yet kindly in their expression.

As he passed them Bess took up her baskets with a groan. "Aw wish aw wur at top. Nay, my lass," as Dot seized one; "it's too heavy for thy little arms. Better strain my owd stiff back than thy young tender un."

"Let *me* carry the baskets up for you, mistress," said the boy, coming forward with eager kindli-

ness. "They'll be nothin' to me. I'm strong and used to carrying weights." He was from the south, and his speech sounded strangely soft and pleasant in Dot's ears.

"Tha doesna look it," said Bess. "But thank ye kindly. Aw'm dead beat, and that's a fac', and aw'll remember thee. Tha run on, Dot, and oppen th' door."

Key in hand, Dot started off. There was a delay in the transfer of the baskets, owing to the fringe of Bess's shawl having become entangled in the wicker-work, and light-heeled Dot had reached the landing before it was made. There she stopped suddenly, hardly able to believe her eyes. The door of their room, left locked in the morning, stood ajar, and the glow of a blazing fire came through the aperture into the dark passage, and danced and flickered on the opposite wall.

What could it mean? Fire! With the thought Dot sprang forward and looked eagerly in. She came back quickly, with a scared and puzzled face. "Mother!" she cried, meeting Bess and her at-

tendant, "there's a man in our room, a-sitting by the fire, and *such* a fire. Look!"

"A mon i' our room!" ejaculated Bess. "Well, aw never. But dunno thee be frit, my lass, aw'll shunt him, the imperent——" and she advanced with bellicose aspect, Dot following timidly in her wake.

But Bess's look changed utterly as her eyes fell on the man who sat gloating over the fire with evident enjoyment. He was a big ill-looking fellow, with grizzled, sandy hair, retreating brows, deep-set eyes, and heavy under-shot jaw. He looked up at her with a sardonic grin. "Well, Bess, aw've coomed back," he said.

Bess sank upon the nearest seat. "Tha's—coomed—back!" she gasped, her face deadly pale under its weather stains.

"Ay, aw've coomed back," he said. "Tha doesna seem so glad to see me as a good woife should be."

"Aw'd liefer ha' seen th' devil himsen, and tha knows it," said Bess, rallying. "But list thee, Sam Branker, woife o' thoine aw may be, by t'

law as poor foak conna break, but tak' thee back to bed and board aw will na."

"Aw never axed thee," he said, with another grin, that changed into a savage scowl as he went on. "Aw coomed, and aw mean to stand o' my roights, aw tell thee, and tha's best tak' it quoiet."

A helpless feeling came over Bess. She was sick and worn out, and stunned with the suddenness of the blow. "Tha's gettin' things rare and coomfortable," he said, somewhat mollified by her silence, and glancing round approvingly. Then seeming for the first time to see Dot as she cowered close to Bess, he pointed to her. "Who's yon ?" he questioned meaningly, "who's yon, I ax ?"

The full magnitude of the trouble that had come upon her burst upon Bess as she looked down upon poor Dot's frightened, appealing face. "Oh, my blessin', my blessin' !" she sobbed, catching her to her breast, "aw wouldna ha' cared but for thee !"

"Tha'rt a noice un !" said Sam, in a tone

which drove honest Bess to indignant self-vindication. "Oo's none o' moine," she said, "though aw loove her as if oo were. Oo's th' choild o' a poor lass who doied i' yon bed when oo was a babby."

"Loikely story," interrupted Sam. "Well, aw tell thee, if tha want'st to keep a whole skin o' *her* back, tha'dst best behave thysen to me. So get some soopper, and let's be coomfortable--aw'll noan quarrel if tha doesna."

There was nothing for it but to obey.

CHAPTER XII.

"MOTHER NO MOTHER."

NO; there was nothing for it but to comply. Bess knew herself to be helpless; and, thoroughly cowed by the threat of cruelty to Dot, set about getting the tea, Dot following her movements with timid helpfulness.

The anticipated feast was cooked, and set upon the table, but Sam, who took the dainty fish to his share, alone did justice to it. He ate like a famished wolf; but Bess was too sick at heart, Dot too choked with indignation and fear, to eat —a fact that did not at all discompose the intruder, or, indeed, attract his notice.

His meal finished, he drew his chair right in front of the fire, and produced a stumpy clay pipe. "Now, Bess, send fur soom baccy, and a quart o' gin, and we'n be coomfortable," he commanded.

"Aw'll go mysen," answered Bess, sullenly ; "the choild's noan used to sich arrants."

"Time oo wur then. It's ill keepin' dogs and barkin' onesen ; and tha 'll noan do it no more," snapped Sam, with returning ill-humour

"I'll go, mother," said Dot beseechingly ; "I'd rather go than be left with *him*," she added in a lower tone. And seeing Sam glowering angrily at them, Bess let her go.

So poor Dot went out into the cold and storm, which yet had less terror for her than the glare of the hated and evil place which she had never before entered. Alas ! alas ! its evil sights and sounds were henceforth to be too familiar to her.

She did her errand quickly, for the rain was falling in icy sheets, and having, as usual, cleared away the supper things, she cowered down to Bess's side, as much as possible out of sight of the bleared eyes that had glared at her so savagely. Poor little thing ! her mind was in a whirl, her little heart ready to burst with pain and terror. That dreadful man going to stay there always—to eat up mother's fish and drink

up mother's money ; to make mother drink too, perhaps—for Bess had not dared, probably had not wished in her downheartedness, to refuse Sam's gracious offer of a share of the liquor bought with her own hard earnings, and was already talking noisily under its influence. *And mother not her mother!* she had said so—that was the strangest, bitterest thought of all, and sent a chill of desolation to the loving little heart. What ever would life—life that had been so pleasant—be like, she wondered drearily, under such new and strange conditions ?

Harder and darker and sadder than you can even imagine, poor little rudely but tenderly nurtured child ! But courage, little Dot ! A helpless, dying hand laid you, an unconscious babe, in the tender and never-failing arms of One strong to protect, faithful to provide, mighty to save. They, unseen, unfelt, unknown, ever are around and beneath you ; and their clasp is safety, for the love that nerves them is self-existent, almighty, and everlasting !

The night wore on ; the bottle was emptied

without much aid from Bess, whose appetite had been restrained by the consciousness of the still, sorrowful little presence at her side, and by appealing pulls at her gown. Therefore, when Sam staggered from beside the empty bottle and dying fire, and flung himself upon the bed, she was quite in possession of her senses.

A heavy snore rising almost as the drunken head touched the pillow set Dot free to move and speak. "Oh, mother! is it true? is it true?" she questioned in pitiful appeal.

"Ay, my lass, it's true, worse luck!" answered Bess bitterly. "Aw married him when aw wur a yoong fou'."

"I know—I don't mean that. But, oh, mother!" with a burst of tears, "is yon true what tha saidst, that—that I'm no child o' thine?"

Bess clasped her to her breast, and sought to soothe her with kisses and tender words. "But is it? oh! is it?" persisted Dot.

"Ay, that's true too," Bess answered reluctantly. "But dunno thee tak' on loike this, my darlin'; it mak's no differ—aw couldna loov thee

moor if tha wur. It mak's no differ, Dot," she repeated anxiously.

"I suppose—not," Dot answered slowly. "But—it feels strange and lonely like. Who was—my mother, then?" she asked, after a pause..

"That aw conna tell thee, my lass; but wait till aw rake t' foire together; tha'rt shiverin'. Theer, sit thee down on t' cricket i' front, and aw'll tell thee how thou cam'st to be t' choild o' my heart and t' blessin' o' my loife, as tha art, Dot, as tha art."

We are familiar with the story to which Dot listened with tear-glistening eyes and suspended breath. When it was finished she flung herself upon Bess's neck. "I'll love thee more than ever now," she sobbed. "Tha'st been so good, so good!"

"Aw've been more nor paid, my blessin', more nor paid," said Bess, stroking the dark head fondly. "But aw wish to-neet"—she paused—"ay, aw do—that aw knew thi mother's foak. If yon leads me t' loife oo used to du, aw'd gi' thee oop to save thee from it, aw 'ud, tho' it

'ud be loike tearin' out my very heart to du it!"

"But I wouldn't go, mother," said Dot, clinging to her—"no, not if it was to live in the Queen's palace!"

"Eh-h-h, my lass, tha doesna know, tha doesna know!" groaned Bess, relapsing into thought. "If aw knowed but t' name o' t' place oo coom from," she said, after a silence. "Aw'm welley sure oo said oo's name wur *Alice*. Aw didna moind it at first, but t' neet oo wur buried, as I sot here wi' thee i' my lap, a-thinkin' over all oo'd said, it coom to me *nat'ral*, as it wur, that oo'd called ooself *Alice*, by chance loike, i' telling her tale, and aw don't know whoi it should if oo didna. And oo said oo's mother's name wur Dor-ror-thy, loike thoine as wur named for her. If aw did but know t' place, now."

"Never mind, mother. I'd rather be your child nor the Queen's!" said Dot, again using the *ne plus ultra* of her imagination.

"Bless thee!" ejaculated Bess. "But aw'm feart yon 'll mak' me wicked and bad, Dot, and

thee too, m'appen. Well, theer's no help for 't, unless Him as is above 'll tak' notice on us. Thi poor mother thowt He'd browt me to her, and aw've mony a toime thowt as He browt thee to me, my blessin'!" Then with a sudden thought, "Si' thee, Dot, to yon jar on t' shelf, wheer t' money is. Reach it down; theer's that in it tha'll loike to see."

Dot obeyed. Bess took, fair and bright from out its many dust-soiled wrappings, the cripple's painted card. "Aw took it out o' thi poor mother's dead fingers," she explained.

"Oh, how pretty!" exclaimed Dot, taking it reverently. "What's on it, mother?"

"Texes."

"What's texes?" asked Dot, still contemplating the card.

"Words out o' th' good book as parsons read i' church, my lass."

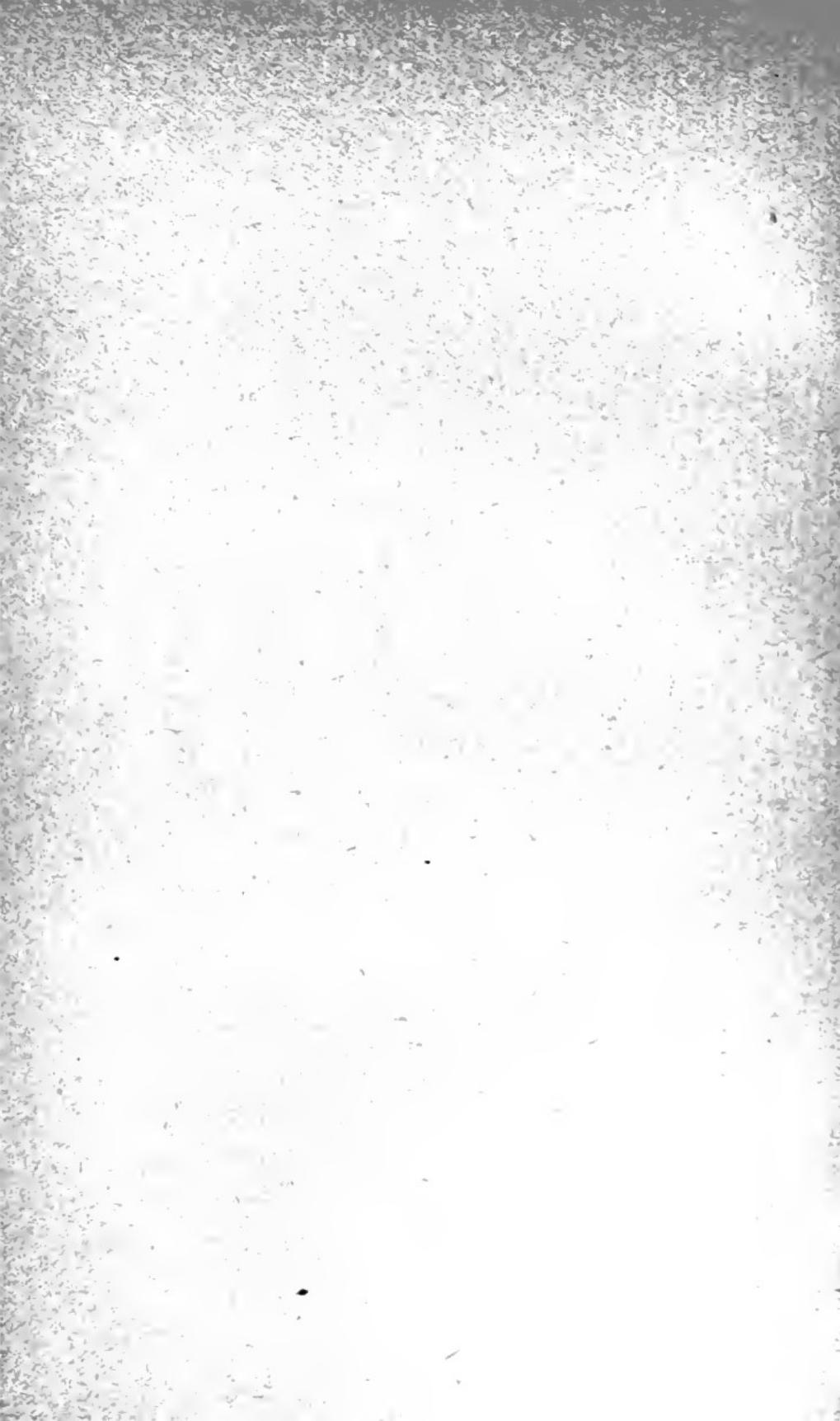
Dot looked up with earnest, puzzled eyes, but Bess had no further explanation to give. "I'd like to know 'em," she said wistfully. "Dost mind 'em, mother?"

"Nay, my lass, aw conna say aw do, though Sall Weeks read 'em oop—oo wur a good scholard, oo wur. But theer's soommat about 'Coom to Me,' and 'rest,' and 'save th' lost.' And 't seemed to me as if Him as is above moight ha' sent a h'angel down wi' 'em to that poor lost lass—theer wur sich a smoile and look o' rest o' th' poor dead face as had been so sad i' loife."

"Perhaps He did, mother," said Dot, with the simple unreasoning faith of childhood. "Eh, but He must be rare good and kind. I wish I could read 'em, mother! I wish I could read 'em!"

Bess felt a twinge of conscience, and answered a little tartly in consequence. "Well, if tha hadstna been so sharp i' keepin' out o' t' way o' they new school chaps, tha'dst ha' *could* by now," she said, though she had aided and abetted Dot in so doing. "But coom, my lass, it's toime tha wur asleep. Tha'dst best keep t' card thysen, now; tha'll happen foind soom one as'll read it thee, and yon ud tear it oop i' spoite as lief as look at it."

Dot and Bess slept on the floor that night. But the child's sleep was sweet, and full of strange fair dreams, in which a face, a form, a presence, brighter and lovelier than any she had gazed on with wonder and delight in the print-shop windows, seemed to hover over her as she lay, with outstretched arms, and eyes of love, and sweet-voiced lips which whispered, "Come to Me"—dreams which left an indelible impression on her mind.



CHAPTER XIII.

DOT'S FANCIES.

THAT dark December day ushered in, as well may be supposed, a new and dreary phase of Dot's life.

Sam was as good as his word, and stood upon his rights—which were, as he interpreted them, to appropriate the bulk of Bess's earnings, the best of the food, and the warmest of the fire, and to exact slavish service from Bess and Dot. The smallest opposition roused his usually surly temper to savage fury. Resentful, disheartened, and wretched, Bess was little likely to submit patiently. Quarrels, even to blows, were frequent ; but Sam soon learned that those that fell on Dot hurt Bess most, and she suffered accordingly.

Cold and hunger followed in the train of drunkenness and extravagance. Bess's earnings,

at their best, could not have borne the strain made upon them for the support of the idle, drunken fellow, who never did a hand's turn of work, and as long as his wants were supplied did not care to run the risk of dishonesty ; and, as we have said, Bess was no longer the woman she had been. And alas ! alas ! as things grew worse and worse, and one by one the decencies of her room disappeared, and Dot grew thinner and raggeder, and more woe-begone, and trade, owing to her straitened capital, became less and less profitable, Bess turned to the bad friend that was still the best she knew of, bringing as it did temporary exhilaration, temporary forgetfulness of her own and Dot's miseries.

A year—whose bitter experiences of abuse and want and sorrow of heart can have no record—passed. Dot had for some months sold lights and papers in the streets, Sam having declared it waste of time for her to go dragging after Bess, who could earn as much without her. That was possibly true ; but, alas ! she could also spend more ; and Dot crept wearily home at nightfall,

not to the warm fire, and comfortable tea, and loving looks that had once cheered her through days of cold and loneliness, but to a room reduced to its old wretchedness: a grudged and stinted meal, sometimes not that, but cruel blows, and, bitterest element of all to Dot, a stupefied or rowdy mother.

Poor Bess had not fallen without a struggle, but her pain and cold and misery were almost more than could be borne unaided, and when to these were added remorse for her part in Dot's sufferings, the burden of her sober hours became intolerable. She was never consciously harsh, much less cruel, to Dot, but the child, made sensitive by nature and past tenderness, could not but suffer from the effects of a temper roughened by drink or depressed by reaction.

Poor little Dot! Sadly changed was she from the bright-eyed little lassie that had tripped so cheerily through the rain that dull December day at the time we took up our story. Her delicate features were pinched and sharpened, her cheeks hollow, her great grey eyes, gleaming wistfully

out beneath an overhanging mass of dark, tangled hair, gave a weird, woe-begone look to her face. Her clothes were in rags, but as yet she was roughly shod. Too often she bore the marks of blows.

She had a fixed sum—one shilling—to make every day ; to return without it was always the signal for a quarrel between Bess and Sam. She had a good spirit, and had always been able to hold her own with the children of the court ; but it was hard work to do so with her fellow street-vendors, many of them strong, rough boys, who drove her from coveted vantage-posts, and sometimes jostled, and even robbed her of pence or wares; and on the days that Bess could not secretly help her with a start of pence she was rarely able to earn her tyrant's fee.

Amid all these sorrows Dot had but one comfort, beyond the brief gleams of mother-love enjoyed when Bess was herself and Sam absent. And that was to fancy—as she did in her saddest hours, when lying cold and hungry, or sick and sad, or bruised and beaten, on her heap of straw

in the corner with Bess and Sam, quiet at last, stretched out in drunken stupor—to fancy that “Him as was above” might send a beautiful angel, such as she had seen in that fair, unforgotten dream, to comfort and carry her away in its kind outstretched arms, whither she knew not, but away—away from her pain and misery, as she loved to fancy He had done to her poor dead mother. To *fancy*—of course it could not be! Bess said it could not now; and the learned cobbler in the room below, who read the papers every day, and had big books upon his shelf,—whom hungry longing had one day given her courage to ask to read her the words upon her card,—had growled: “All a fool’s fancy, all a fool’s fancy, lass!” as, having done so, he tossed it back. Yes, a fancy; of course she knew it; but it was dear and soothing to her little desolate heart, as were the strange, sweet words,—by whom spoken, of what meaning she could not tell, yet which somehow seemed always to send so sweet and warm a glow through her,—“Come unto Me, all ye that are weary, and I will give you rest.”

"Come unto Me," "Come unto Me, all ye that are weary," she would repeat over and over. "Somebody must ha' said it—it sounds so kind and real-like. Somebody good and lovin' and strong, too, I'm thinkin'!"

Yes, little Dot, Somebody had said it, Somebody good and loving and strong—to whom the helpless "feeling after" of thy little hungry, untaught heart was a more prevailing prayer than formal supplications borne by choral swell of many voices through stately pillared aisles; and its answer was sure.

Towards the close of one bleak, dreary day, Dot turned, bitter-hearted, from a hopeless struggle to be first with her papers on a 'bus-step, and, not minded to let the tears she could not repress, as she saw paper after paper handed in, be mocked at by her rival, darted across the wide street. She was yet wiping away fast-flowing tears when she felt a little cold hand on her arm, and, looking up, saw beside her a pale, fragile-looking little lad, a paper-seller like herself, but even more ragged, and barefoot. He was panting

A LITTLE COLD HAND."





with the haste he had made. "I was feart I sh'dn't catch ye," he gasped. "Tha run so quick, and they lurries takes such a time to pass, and tha dropped three o' thy pappers i' th' scrimmage. These is them; they'm none the worse."

Dot was amazed; she was so used to having papers "scripped" from her. "I'm sure I'm much obliged to ye," she said. "But why didna tha keep 'em? I should never ha knowed who had 'em."

"But God would!" said the boy, with a bright, quick, upward look. "Paper, sir? Here, sir!" and he was on the steps of a 'bus and whirled away in a moment.

Dot gazed after him with a startled yet brightened look in her great eyes. "*God!* That's Him as is above!" she said to herself. "I never thought He'd notice sich a thing as that. But th' little lad spoke sure like, and looked at th' sky with just sich a look as I've seen happy little childer a-trottin' along by their father's side a-turnin' to his face, so trustin' and lovin' loike.

Eh-h-h ! but I'd loike to think it. For then in course He'd know when the boys shove me, and chuck my things i' the dirt, and nobody 'll buy my pappers, and Sam beats me so cruel when I've done my best. And if He knew, happen He'd feel sorry, for He must be rare and kind to look down sich a long way on poor street childer, as th' rich foak as seem so good and nice pass by wi'out so much as a look. Eh-h-h ! but I'd like to think it. It feels just like 'Come unto Me,' it does !"

And Dot went on her way with a new light in her great sad eyes, a new "fancy" glowing warm and sweet in her sore little heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

*SUMMERS.**

THOUGH Dot's new "fancy" was a great comfort to her, she could not be content till she knew it to be more. To that end she longed for a meeting with the little pale boy, who seemed "so sure and knowin'," as she phrased it to herself. His little frail form and white, thin face were quite familiar to her, though she had never spoken to him before.

It was some days before she had a chance. Bess had so bad a touch of bronchitis that it was impossible for her to go out; and as there was, as usual now, neither money nor food in the house, Sam condescended to go her rounds, with Dot as guide and saleswoman.

* All related of this little lad, beyond his connection with Dot, is absolute, unvarnished fact.

But the weather was bleak, and the baskets were heavy, and they were as soon as possible relegated to poor Bess, weak and suffering as she was. Two days Dot was allowed to accompany her; the third she was ordered back to her work upon the streets.

For the first time, but for her mother's sake, she was nothing loth to go. All day long she looked and inquired for the little lad,—Summers, she found he was called,—but though often told he was "somewhere about," she never came across him.

It was a bad day for her. Do what she would she could not sell her lights or papers, and night-fall found her with only half her pittance earned, though she had spent nothing on food. *Did* "Him as was above" know how cold and weak and hungry she was, and how she wanted to see Summers?—she wondered, less and less hopefully, as time after time she was elbowed away from a chance, or pushed roughly aside by a hurrying passer-by, on whom, with the courage of despair, she ventured to press her wares.

She was more unwilling than usual to go home without her full tale of bricks, because she was sure her mother would not have been able to earn much, so Sam would be in a savage mood, and Bess would never see her beaten without interference that cost her dear. But at last she could keep up no longer, and turned fearfully homewards.

Her nearest way lay through some narrow streets of warehouses, deserted then, for it was between eight and nine o'clock. The rain that had fallen throughout the day had ceased, and the moon was shining in a clear, cold sky. By its light Dot saw a little figure creep stealthily round a corner a few yards ahead. It looked so like Summers, that, tired as she was, she turned out of her way to pursue it.

It was a very narrow street into which it had turned, a tilted cart blocked it a little way down, the high warehouses on each side shut out all but a little strip of sky. Seeing no one, Dot was about to retrace her steps, when her eye caught a little figure kneeling on the damp flags on the

other side of the cart, with clasped, upraised hands and white face lifted to the strip of sky. There was light enough for her to see that it was Summers. "What art tha doing here?" she called suddenly under the cart.

The boy started to his feet with a terrified look, which changed to a pleasant smile as Dot went round to him.

"I thowt it wur p'leece," he said. "Nobody but them cooms here this time o' neet."

"I saw thee creepin' round the corner, and followed, cos I wanted to speak to thee," said Dot. "Thi name's Summers, isn't it?"

"They calls me so, cos my name's *Winters*—Joey Winters—I s'pose," he answered, with a smile.

"And where does tha live?" asked Dot, wakened to interest by the boy's gentle face and manner.

"I lives nowhere," he answered; "on'y when I've got t' brass I sleep sat Dan Buck's lodgin's."

"But has tha no father nor mother?"

"No; at least, father's dead and mother's run away," was the plaintive answer.

"Oh, poor little chap! Whatever does tha do?" exclaimed Dot.

"Oh, I gets on pretty fair," he answered cheerily. "I sells papers, tha knows, and sometimes folks is kind, and gives me a h'odd copper or two, cos I'm so small and weakly like. And when I ain't got brass for a bed I sleeps i' this cart."

"Oh, poor little chap!" exclaimed Dot again.
"But isn't it cold?"

"Ay, it's some cold," he answered patiently.
"But t' carter al'as leaves plenty o'straw in it o' purpose for me; ain't it good o' him?"

The tears she seldom shed for her own sorrows gathered in Dot's eyes. "Tha'rt worse off nor me by long chalks," she said; "for I've a room to sleep in and the best mother as ever was. Eh-h-h, but I'm sorry for thee."

Answering tears stood in the little fellow's eyes, and his voice trembled as he said, with a quivering smile, "I don't mind it so *very* much, cos, tha knows, it won't be fur long. I'm goin' home soon."

"Goin' home? I thought tha had no home," exclaimed puzzled Dot.

"Ah, but I have, though," he said, a full smile now lighting his wan face; "up theer, wi' Jesus."

Dot followed his upward glance with wondering eyes. "Who is Jesus?" she asked.

"Eh, does na tha know?" exclaimed Summers, aghast and pitiful.

"Is it Him as is above?" asked Dot. Then, breathless with a thought that flashed across her, "Oh, is it Him as said 'Come unto Me'?"

"Ay, it's Him," answered Summers, nodding and smiling. "I thowt tha must know 'bout *Him*."

"But I don't. On'y I've got a card, and tha saidst He'd ha' knowed if tha'd kep' my papers," explained Dot, not very lucidly. "That's what I wanted to ask thee 'bout."

"In course He'd ha' knowed. He knows everythin'."

"But I shouldn't ha' thought He'd take notice o' such things as that, or o' us as is so poor and ragged," said Dot anxiously.

"Oh, shouldn't you?" answered Summers, with a radiant face. "Why, lass, He *loves* us!"

He died for us, died for us o' the cross, and now
He's in heaven a-thinkin' of us, and a-lovin' of us,
and a-hearin' us when we pray, and makin' ready
a beautiful home for us to live in for ever, wheer
we sha'n't never be hungry nor sick nor cold no
more."

"Eh-h-h, but it sounds *beau-tiful!*" said
Dot. "I've *fancied* somethin' a bit like it mysen,
but it seemed too good to be true, and this is
better. Art sure it's true, Joey?"

"Ay, it's true," he answered.

"Jesus loves me, this I know,
For the Bible tells me so ;
Little ones to Him belong :
They are weak, but He is strong."

"And does tha think He loves *me?*" asked
Dot tremulously.

"I'm sure on it. Tha'rt a little un, and weak,
art na tha?"

"Eh-h-h, but it's good o' Him," said Dot.
"And mother, poor mother, dost think He loves
her too, Joey ? She 's over-fond o' the drink, tha
knows," she admitted reluctantly.

"In course He loves her," said Joey confidently.
"Why, He cam' into the world o' purpose to save
sinners, and to bear th' punishment i'stead o' them.
Si' thee, what's thy name?"

"Dot—Dot Branker."

"Well, Dot, tha coom wi' me to th' Ragged
School o' Sunday, and teacher 'll tell thee all
about Him—how He was bornded i' a stable, and
had not wheer to lay His head, and died o' th'
cross for our sins, and went back to heaven to
mak' us a home, and loves us, and hears us, and
it'll mak' thee foine and happy." And the little
street-preacher gasped for breath.

"Did tha learn it all theer?" asked Dot, to
whom school was a word of terror. "Well, I'll
coom," as Joey nodded.

"A' reet," he responded joyfully. "We'n say
good-neet now then, for I'm feart o' t' p'leece
catchin' me afore I gets to bed."

"Good-night," said Dot. "But I'm loth to
leave thee all by thyself, poor little chap."

"Eh, but I'm not by myself," said Joey, with
another of his bright upward looks. "Jesus is up

theer, a-watchin' over me, and He'd know in a minute if anythin' came nigh to hurt me."

They arranged place and time for meeting on the next Sunday—this was Monday—and parted. Dot, turning at the corner for a farewell look, saw Joey kneeling again, with clasped hands and lifted face. "He's talking to Him as is above," she whispered with awe. "Eh-h-h, but it's wonderful! And I wish to-morrow wur Sunday, I do."



CHAPTER XV.

DOT'S FIRST PRAYER.

DOT went her way with a confused, delighted sense of something having happened which had changed the whole aspect of life to her. She did not at all *understand* the things that Joey had told her; it was not likely she would. They were as new to her as if she had been born a little swarthy savage in African wilds. But a warm glow of hope and comfort, born of a delicious sense of being loved and cared for by some One infinitely good and strong and kind, so filled her little breast that her wants and fears were forgotten till she reached the dark passage leading into the court in which she lived.

They were brought back to her rudely then.

“Has tha got thi money, Dot?” asked a boy from the house in passing.

"No," she faltered ruefully.

"Tha'llt cop it, then. Thi feyther's drunk, and has been lickin' thi mother loike a' th' foon."

Poor little Dot stood still in terror. "Oh, what shall I do! what shall I do!" she cried, clasping her hands.

Suddenly, so softly and sweetly that her fancy might have come true, and an angel have been sent to whisper in her ear, the words "Come unto Me" rang through her little frightened soul.

She stood stock still a moment, and thought. "I can but try," she said aloud at last, and, kneeling on the slushy flags, like Joey, with clasped hands, she looked up to the sky, and said, "O Him that is above, if that as Joey tellt me is true, and Tha loves such poor little ragged things as me, please t' help me. I've tried my best, indeed I have; but th' boys is so rough, and no folks hardly wanted lights, and I'm so tired and hungry; and Sam's drunk, and 'll beat me cruel, and Joey says Tha'd know in a minnit if anybody came nigh to hurt *him*. Oh, *please* t' help me, *please* t' keep Sam from beatin' me."

"· PLEASE · T' HELP · SEE · "



T. Pym.



She rose then, and with slow steps and beating heart ascended the stairs and opened the door. Bess lay in a huddled heap, asleep or in a stupor. Sam was sitting sullenly by an empty gin-bottle. He turned, and swore at her fiercely as she crept timidly in, and her heart sank within her. She handed him the money. With an oath he threw it on the table, started up with furious eyes, and, snatching a strap, raised it with savage intent. Poor Dot's heart sent out a despairing cry, and she sank a cowering heap on the floor at his feet, in shuddering expectation of the first of a rain of blows.

But it came not. "Prayer moves the hand that rules the world," and that mighty hand was laid on that brutalized heart.

For what seemed to Dot in her suspense and terror long moments there was silence and stillness. Then a sound as of something flung to the other side of the room. Then Sam shoved her with his foot. "Get up," he said, "and fetch us sixpenn'orth o' gin."

Dot sprang up, snatched up bottle and money,

and sped out into the street again. It seemed as if she trod on air. "He heard me! He heard me! Oh, it's true, it's all true!" she kept repeating. "I don't care for nothin' now!"

And in all Manchester that night no child's heart beat more joyfully and thankfully than little Dot Branker's, when, having supped on a dry crust shoved towards her by Sam, she lay down to rest on her heap of straw.

CHAPTER XVI.

LITTLE JOEY ENTERS IN.

SUNDAY came in due—but to Dot very slow—course. Things in the meantime had gone very hard with her. Bess, suffering and wretched, had been drunk much of the time, cross and despondent when not. Sam, stinted of his “rights,” was more savage and surly than ever. And she had never come across Joey. The warm glow had died out of her heart. “Happen it’s cos I don’t understand,” she thought, and longed for Sunday.

To the moment she was at the appointed rendezvous, but Joey was not there; and though she waited hour after hour, no Joey came. She went home in very doleful mood. “Happen th’ little lad wur on’y coddin’ me,” she thought bitterly; “and somethin’ might ha’ come over Sam.”

But she could not think this really or long. Little Joey had seemed so earnest and so true, and such a thing had never come over Sam before or since. It was more likely Joey was too ill to come. He had looked so pale and thin and weak, and sleeping out that raw, damp night! This thought made Dot feel pitiful and anxious, but was far more bearable than the first.

Again her patience was to be tried. Bess was worse than ever, and for three days she had no chance of meeting Joey. But on the fourth, in defiance of Bess's remonstrance, Sam, put on short allowance of gin, turned her out late in the evening, and weary with a long day's hawking, daring her to return "under sixpenn'orth." But as Bess contrived to slip a purposely-reserved threepence into her hand unobserved, the task was not a hopeless one, and Dot was almost glad of it, in that it gave her a chance of at least hearing something of Joey.

Fortune favoured her. She had hardly got into Market Street when she met a lad called Dick, one of the least ill-natured of her tormentors, and

whom she had often seen with Joey, whom he patronized and protected.

"Has tha seen Summers to-day, Dick?" she asked anxiously.

The boy stopped suddenly in the midst of a hideous grimace he was executing for her benefit. "Nay," he answered in a changed tone, "they wouldna let me. He's gone by now, I specs."

"Gone!" cried Dot. "Where?"

"To t' grand home he wur al'as talkin' about, I s'pose. Leastways, they said he wur deein' this mornin'."

"Deein'!" exclaimed Dot. "Deein'! Oh, don't say that, Dick, don't say that!"

"It won't make much differ my saying it or not," said Dick, with a doggedness that covered much sorrow of heart. "He *be* deein'."

And he went on to tell how, a little over a week ago, poor little "Summers" had dropped in a faint at the corner of Corporation Street, and had been taken to the nearest approach to a home he had—Dan Buck's lodging-house—by the order of his ragged-school teacher, who happened to

pass at the time, and how he had gone off in a "gallopin' waste," though, as Dick said, "Theer wasna mich on him to waste, poor little chap!"

Dot's great grief touched Dick in a tender point, and, to comfort her, he directed her to Dan Buck's. "'Tain't no good, though, for he'll be i' heaven by now," he said to himself, drawing his ragged sleeve across his eyes. "Whoi, Dick, tha fou', tha'it croin' loike a babby!" and with a whoop that sounded as unmirthful as it was hideous, he darted forward, and upset an old woman's orange-basket by way of raising his spirits.

But little Joeey was not in heaven yet. So Dot learned from Mrs. Buck, who, however, refused to let her see him, and she was turning broken-hearted away, when, to her wonder and delight, a gentleman who had come in and stood by unobserved, took her part. "Let her come in with me," he said; "I will see she does not harm him." And he took her little cold hand in such a warm, kind clasp, and led her kindly up the stairs,

telling her she must not grieve for Joey, who was very happy, and going home to Jesus.

They entered a bare little room, where, on a hard, dingy bed, Joey lay. His eyes were closed, and the tears were flowing thick and fast down his white, white cheeks.

"Crying again, Joey," said the gentleman, tenderly laying his hand on the brow on which the death-dews gleamed. "You are not afraid, are you?"

He opened his eyes then. Love and joy shone in them. "Afeerd o' goin' home to Jesus?" he said. "No, sir; oh no, no! 'Tain't no use o' *me* livin'. But somehow I can't help cryin', I feels so soft and weak like."

He was very weak, and closed his eyes wearily. After a time he opened them again. "Why, Dot, is that thee?" he said feebly. "Eh, but I'm glad. I couldna come o' Sunday; but I minded thee, and asked Jesus t' look after thee. Tha tell her about Him, teacher; I can't now."

"I will, Joey; she shall have your place in my class," was the kind and earnest reply.

Joey gave a look and smile of love and trust into the kind face bending over him, and again closed his eyes.

"Where's Dick?" he asked suddenly, after a while.

"He's not here, Joey; but I'll tell him anything you like."

With an effort he pulled two dirty papers, the remnant of his last stock, from under his pillow. "Give one t' him," he said, "and keep t' other yersen. It's all I've got to give ye."

He was quiet a while, then he asked, "Can I sing?"

"It will hurt you, Joey," was the tenderly-spoken reply.

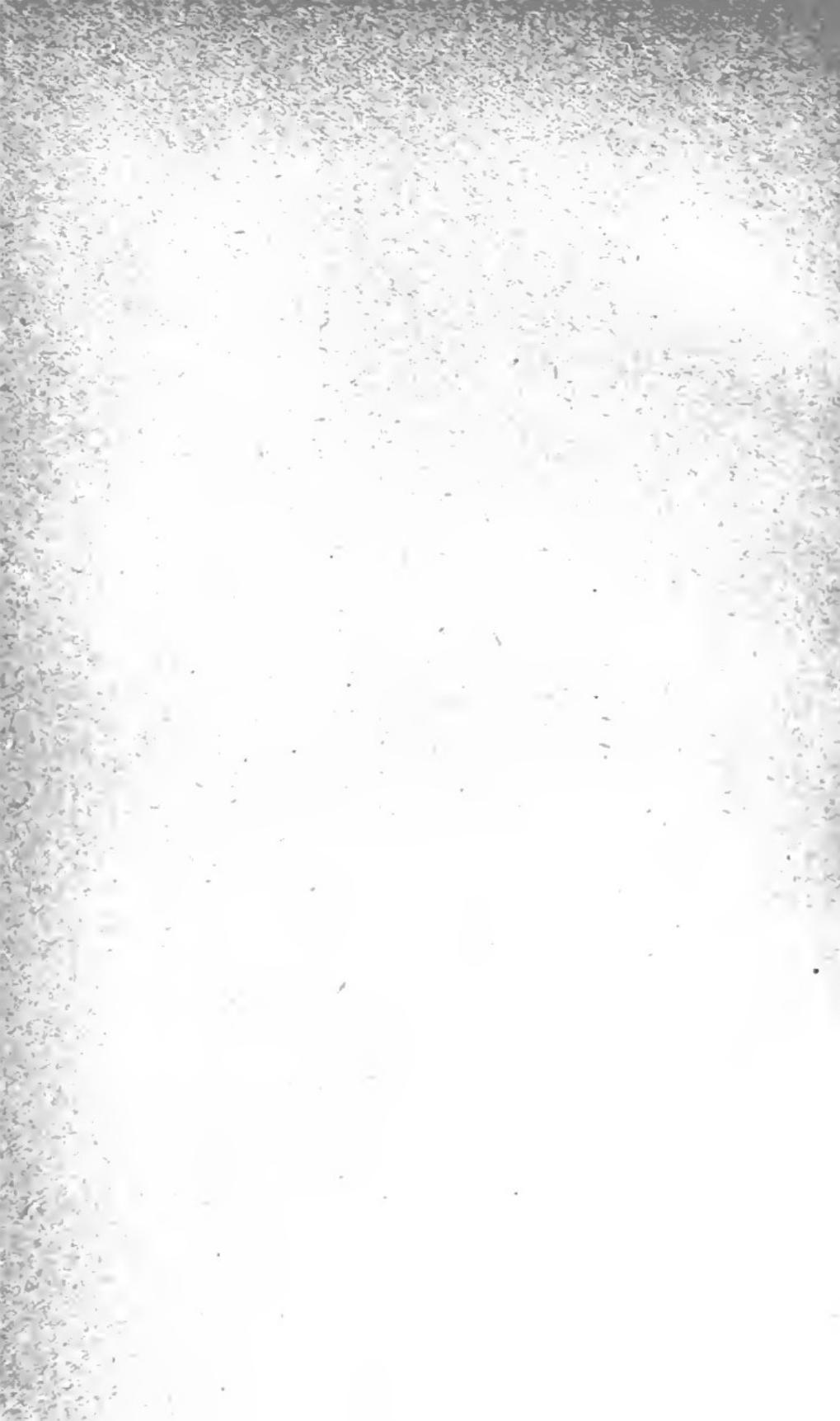
"But I'll want to sing in heaven," he said earnestly; and in a few moments his voice rose clear and distinct in his favourite hymn—

"Jesus loves me, this I know,
For the Bible tells me so;
Little ones to Him belong :
They are weak, but He is strong.
Yes, Jesus loves me, yes, Jesus loves me,
Yes, Jesus loves me ; the Bible tells me so."

He paused a minute or two, and then went on—

“Jesus loves me, He who died
Heaven’s gate to open wide ;
He will wash away my sin,
Let His little child come in.”

His voice failed utterly in the last line, there was a slight struggle, and all was still. Jesus *had* let His little child come in.



• "JOEY IS SAFE.
HOME •"



CHAPTER XVII.

NEVER ALL UP WHILE JESUS LIVES.

THE gentleman having closed Joey's blue eyes tenderly, turned to Dot, who had stood still as a mouse beside him, clinging to the hand which yet held hers in a kind, protective clasp. "Joey is safe home," he said. "Jesus has let His little child come in." There were tears in his eyes, but a solemn gladness in his voice.

Dot burst into a passion of tears. The gentleman sat down upon the bed—there was no other seat in the room—and took her, ragged and dirty as she was, upon his knee. "You are sorry to part with your little friend," he said, "and so am I. But we must be glad for Joey, Dot. He will never be sick or hungry any more; the little feet that were so cold and tired on these muddy Manchester streets will walk now on streets of

gold ; the little body that was so weak and ragged and dirty here will be strong and beautiful, and dressed in spotless clothes of shining white. The little heart that was often so sad and lonely here will be always full of love and joy, for he will be with Jesus, see Him, hear Him speak , and ' God Himself will wipe away all tears from his eyes.' "

"Oh !" sobbed Dot, "but I'd like to ha' gone with him, I would !"

"You could not go with him, my child, but you may go after him. Jesus will surely some day take you to the same bright home if you love and trust Him as Joey did."

"Oh, I don't know how ! I don't know how !" sobbed Dot. "I didn't know nothin' till Joey tellt me."

"Well, I will teach you, as I promised Joey. He told me all about you, Dot, and I had promised him to look after you ; I dare say he thought I had when he saw you with me. But Jesus knew I had no time, and did it Himself, you see."

"Please, sir, it were Dick," said Dot timidly.

"That told you about Joey and sent you here? Yes, I dare say. None the less, it was Jesus' doing, little Dot. He uses odd messengers to do His errands sometimes. But now will you meet *me* next Sunday where you were to have met Joey last week, and at the same time?"

Dot's face was a sight to see, in its tears, its streakiness, and its delight.

"Oh, I will, I will!" she cried. "Oh, sir, how good you are! I thought it were all up wi' me knowin' about Him as is above when Joey were deein'!"

"My child, it is never all up in this world with any one while Jesus lives, and that is for ever. Remember that, Dot, never all up with any one while Jesus lives. He is able and willing to save the weakest, the hardest, and the vilest."

Dot did remember it.

"And now, my child, it is high time you were going home. Where is it you live?"

"I' Ancoats, sir."

"Oh, but that's a long way. You must go at once, and run your best, my dear."

Dot's face fell. "I've got threepence to make first, and it must be after ten," she said dolefully.

"How is that?" asked her friend. Dot explained.

His face grew troubled as he listened. To give the threepence was to minister to the selfish appetite of a degraded sot, to withhold it was to expose that wretched, weary-looking child to brutal usage, or fruitless lingering in the cold, dark streets—perhaps to both. The first was against his principles; the second sorely against his heart. "Oh, when will a Christian Government awake to the sense of its duty of protecting these poor little victims of parental vice!" he groaned inwardly, as, letting his heart triumph, he made Dot's cup of gratitude and joy run over with the gift of the required pence. By the bed where lay the still, cold form of one little victim of the cruel streets, could he have done otherwise?

Tired as Dot was, she shuffled along in her heavy laceless boots at a great rate, the hand, that yet seemed to feel the warm, kind clasp of

her new friend, holding his gift of pence lovingly against the heart which was ready to burst with wonder, gratitude, and joy. She could not feel sorry for Joey any more, not for herself just then. He had got to the beautiful home he had so longed for, and *she* would one day go there too, the grand gentleman had said so; and he with his refined speech and gentle ways and wonderful knowledge was "as an angel of God" to poor little ignorant, roughly-nurtured Dot.

When she reached home Sam was out. Bess, seated on the only chair—a broken one—that the room now contained, was rocking herself to and fro before the fireless grate, her head in her hands, uttering a low moaning sound. The room was strewed with the contents of her baskets, scales and weights and cockels, and with broken earthenware. There had evidently been a struggle.

Dot gave one dismayed glance at the havoc round, and then went up to Bess, who had not noticed her entrance, and put her little blue arms tenderly round her. "Eh-h-h, poor mother, he's been at it again," she said pitifully.

Bess raised a bruised and bleeding face. "Ay, oo's bin at it agin," she repeated, with dull bitterness. "Oo's took all th' brass—th' foive shillin' as aw'd hid atween t' weights for t' market i' th' mornin', and they'll noan gi' me credit now. It's a' oop, Dot, I'd best do for thee and mysen what thi poor mother thowt to do eleven years agone. T' river 'd be noan so mich colder nor this room, aw'm thinkin'." She shivered, and her looks were so wild that Dot was frightened.

"Oh, mother, don't talk like that!" she cried.

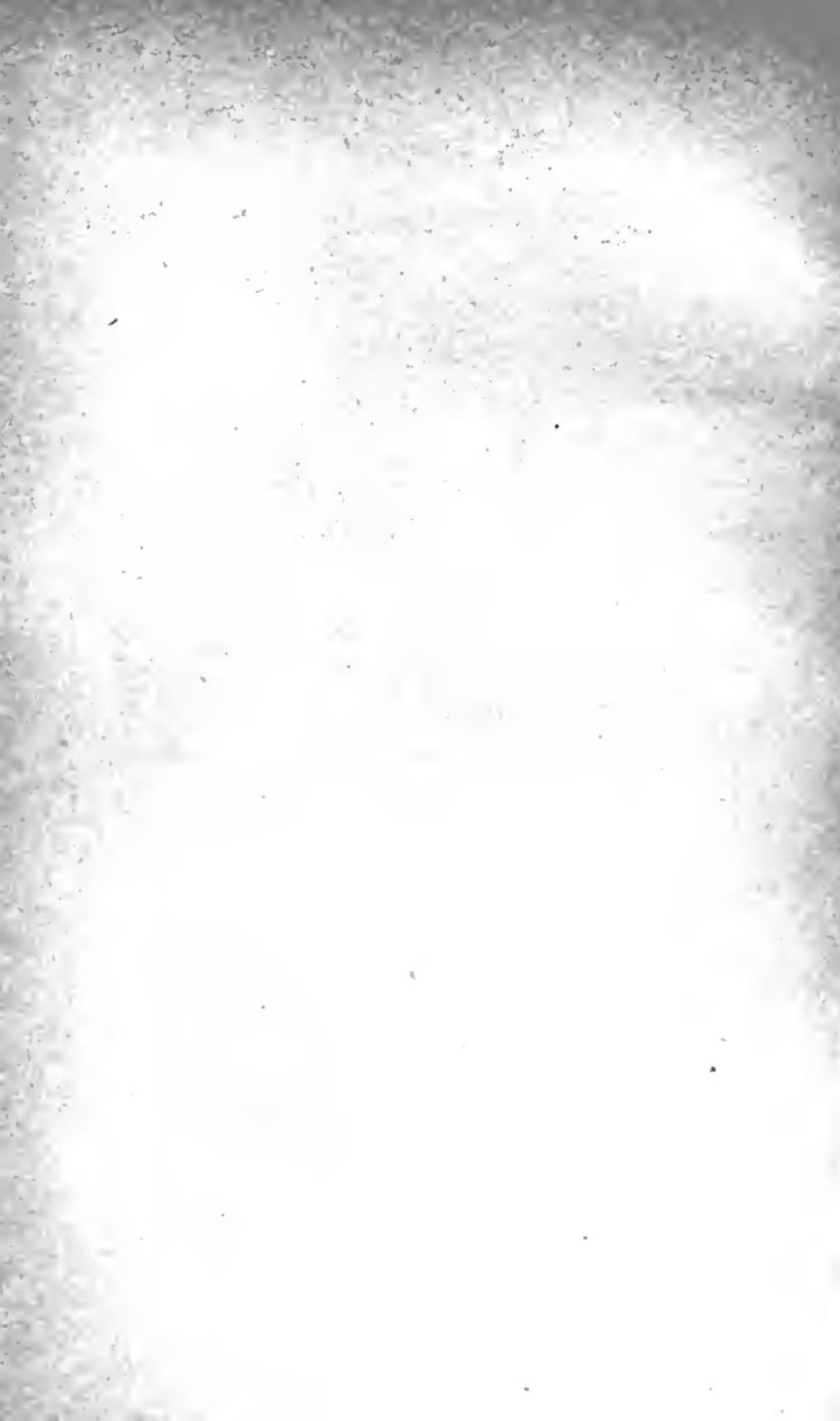
"Whoi not?" said Bess sullenly. "It 'ud be best. Aw conna bear this loife mich longer, and what 'd tha do wi'out me? Better happen," she added with a little laugh, "aw'm nobbut a trooble to thee now."

Dot knelt by her side, and put her arms round her neck, and laid her little thin cheek against the bruised and blowzed one. "I wouldn't be wi'out thee for the world, mother," she said; "it's noan thee, but Sam and the drink that mak's trouble."

Bess's better nature woke for a moment. "Eh my blessin', but aw meant better by thee nor this,

"I WOULDN'T BE · WI'OUT · THEE · NOR ·
· TH'WORLD · "





aw did," she sobbed, clasping Dot close. "But it's a' oop, lass, a' oop, now!" and she relapsed into despondency. She was in a maudlin state; sobered enough by the sleep from which she had been wakened by Sam rifling her pockets, and by the struggle that followed, to realize hard facts, but still too stupefied to take in new ideas. So when, in response to her repeated moan, "It's a' oop, lass, it's a' oop," Dot joyously asserted, "No, mother, it is not, for there's Jesus!" and with all a child's eagerness and incoherence poured forth her story of the wonderful things she had heard; of little Joey gone home to the golden streets and shining clothes, and of Jesus, Who said, "Come unto Me," and was "Him as is above," and knew all about everything and everybody, and was good and loving and strong, and cared for poor folk like them, and heard them when they spoke to Him; and of the grand kind gentleman who had taken her upon his knee, and told her to remember that it was never all up with any one while Jesus lived, and was going to teach her how to get to the beautiful home where Joey was

gone ;—she only listened with a dull, bewildered face, and when Dot, out of breath, paused at last, muttered, “ But it’s a’ oop wi’ *me*, lass, it’s a’ oop now ! ”

Dot was not much discouraged. “ She can’t understand for the drink,” she thought ; “ I’ll tell her again i’ th’ morning.”

But it was not much different then, or the many times after that Dot tried to comfort Bess with her own new hopes and knowledge. She listened, indeed, sometimes tenderly and admiringly, sometimes sullenly and indifferently, according to her mood, but never, to Dot’s wonder, hopefully, still less rejoicingly. “ He’d ha’ nowt to do wi’ *me*,” was her strong conviction concerning “ Him as was above,” and all Dot’s simple logic failed to shake it, or to inspire one ray of hope.

The child was at first sorely troubled and discouraged by her poor mother’s insensibility ; but when she had spent a few Sundays at the Ragged School, and learned as she—little bucket dipped in ocean—would have said, “ all about Jesus,” she took refuge in prayer. And poor Bess

dragging on through weary day after weary day, each one harder than the last, and moaning often with heart and lip, "It's a' oop wi' me!" heard as often a voiceless whisper that she could not choose but hear, "It's never all up with *any one* while Jesus lives."

And slowly, slowly, slowly, unknown to Dot as to herself, a glimmer of hope broke faintly over the dark waste waters of her soul.



CHAPTER XVIII.

"SUMMAT IN IT" FOR BESS.

CHRISTMAS had come and passed. Bells had rung, and groaning boards had been spread, and happy families had gathered, and loving gifts had been given and received, and treasure-laden trees had blossomed and been stripped, but poor little Dot's share in the festivities of the season had been a wistful, wondering gaze into the gaily-decked, teeming shops, or after bright-faced children dancing along with lighted eyes and laden arms.

But now the New Year was at hand, and some hearts, young and old, moved by gratitude and love to Him from Whom all the blessings so richly poured upon their happy Christmastide had come, had planned a feast and festival for such as Dot.

It was the fourth Sunday of her attendance at

the Ragged School and the last day of the year. Bess was sitting alone in the early mid-winter darkness, her head sunk in her hands,—her usual position now,—before a miserable handful of fire, when Dot broke excitedly into the room. She had seen Sam drinking with a “pal” below. “Oh, mother!” she exclaimed, “what dost tha think? There’s goin’ to be a tea-drinkin’ to-morrow at the school, same as last year as Sally Flynn tellt me of, wi’ cakes and buns, and oranges, and tea as sweet as sweet, and a’ in plenty, and ladies and gentlemen to wait o’ ye, and beautiful pictures as moves and speaks after, wi’ Jesus in ‘em every one; an’ teacher’s give me a ticket for me, and a ticket for *you*’s well—si’ thee!” and she held them up in triumph. “Oh, mother, arn’t tha glad?”

“Ay, lass,” said Bess, when she could free herself from the transported hug with which Dot finished. “Aw’m very glad fur thee to have thi fill fur once, that aw am.”

“But tha’llt coom thysen, mother!” cried Dot, chilled by Bess’s apathetic manner.

"Nay, lass, aw'm noan t' sort to go tea-drinkin i' these days," replied Bess bitterly.

"But, mother, tha must! Teacher wants to see thee pertikler. 'Tell yer mother,' he said, 'as I'll be proud to shake hands wi' th' woman as took a helpless orphan to her heart and home.' Them's his very words, mother; and 'mind you bring her,' he says to me!"

"Ay?" said Bess, gratified and softened. "Eh-h-h, but, my lass, he doesna know what drink and Sam ha' made o' me!"

"Oh, but he does, mother—leastways he knows they've made thee mis'rable and poor, and to feel lost and hopeless-like—and it's jest sich as them he cares for, cos Jesus does."

"Well, aw'll go!" said Bess, with sudden determination. "Happen cheer's summat in it arter all," she muttered.

"And tha'll not take no drink to-morrow, mother," said Dot coaxingly. "Cos I want thee to understand, tha knows, all about Jesus and th' good home He's makin' us, and be made happy like me," she pleaded. And, if Bess could not

see the tears in her eyes, she could hear them in her voice.

"Aw won't, Dot," she said earnestly, "not if aw drops i' th' street for want on it, aw won't. And if theer's a chance for me, aw'll tak' it. So theer!"

And that there *was* a chance for her Bess for the first time began consciously to hope, very tremblingly and doubtfully. "Theer mun be summat in it, theer mun," she said to herself as she listened to Dot, cold and hungry as she was, crooning sweet snatches of hymns, or retailing fragments of her teacher's talk. "Yon's another choidt sin' oo heard on it. Eh-h-h, and aw'd be another ooman too, if what oo thinks wur true *fur me!* But it ain't loikely, it ain't nohow loikely! Yon choidt's that loovin' and troostin' i' spoite o' all aw'n brow't her to, oo'd think onybody ud do owt *fur me!* 'Him as is above moight well care *fur her*, poor misfort'nit, innocent darlin'; but nod for sich as me! Nay, it's not loikely, nod nohow loikely!"

But likely or not likely, through the chilled

depths of poor Bess's heart a warm under-current of hope was flowing.

She kept her promise to Dot; and the next afternoon found them, made as tidy as soap and water could make them, wending their way at the appointed time through biting frost and fast-falling snow; Dot radiant with hope and happiness, Bess shy and despondent through the absence of her accustomed "heartenin'."

But when they entered the warm brightly-lighted room, with its evergreen deckings, and snowy-spread tables laden with good cheer, and bright-coloured ware, and flowers and oranges, Dot's delight deepened into ecstasy, and Bess forgot her shyness in admiration. They were early, but a few guests as poor and wretched-looking as themselves were already assembled. Fair, daintily-dressed maidens and beaming-faced children were flitting to and fro, giving finishing touches to the laden tables, and settling the shy and silent guests in their places. At the farther end of the room, where a great white sheet was spread, a number of gentlemen were busy.

"Look, mother, that's were the picture is to be," gasped Dot, finding breath and speech at last. "Oh, isn't it *gr-rand!* And there's teacher—that one with—Oh, mother, he's comin' to speak to ye!"

Sure enough, a gentleman, whose face was all aglow with kindness and delight, was coming quickly towards them. "Well, Dot," he said, "patting her kindly on the head, "isn't this famous? And you've brought mother—that's right. Glad to see you, Mrs. Branker, and to shake hands with a woman who, poor and worse than widowed as she was, did not hesitate to burden herself with an orphan babe."

Bess put her red, coarse hand into his outstretched one. It trembled in the kindly, cordial clasp it met, and the tears stood in her bleared, weary-looking eyes. "Eh, sir, it's noan a burden, but t' blessin' o' my loife yon choildt's been to me," she faltered.

"I am sure of it, Mrs. Branker, and you will say so to all eternity, for by her God is leading you to the Saviour and the Friend you so sorely need," he answered.

"Mr. Kay, Mr. Kay," sounded on two sides of the room at once, and with a smile that beamed hope and encouragement into Bess's heart he left them.

"Dot's reet! Dot's reet! Theer's summat i' it fur *me!*" she thought ecstatically. And all through the feast the words, "By her God is leading you to the Saviour and the Friend you so sorely need," rang like music in her ears.

A royal feast it seemed in amleness and delicacy to the half-famished guests, with "ladies and gentlemen a-waitin' on yer as if yer was kings and queens, and as if they wanted yer to forget theer wur sich things as Sams and drink and wretched homes i' th' world," as Bess whispered to Dot. "Whatever maks' 'em do it, Dot?"

"Oh, mother, it's cos they love Jesus, and wants to please Him," said Dot happily. "And there's nothin' as He likes better nor to help them as conna help theirsens."

"That's me," thought Bess; "everythin' seems to fit in fur me to-neet."

Ay, and "thanks be unto God for His unspeak-

able gift" of a salvation, fitted, and free as the air they breathe, to the most undeserving, the most helpless, the most ignorant; of a Saviour, Who "was dead" with the burden of a world's sin upon His guiltless head, and "is alive for evermore" to "save unto the uttermost," not by a past, vicarious sacrifice alone, but by the power of a Risen and Victorious life, "all that come unto God by Him"—everything did "fit in" for poor Bess Branker that night.

The "old, old story," simply and lovingly told by lips and hearts fraught with the Spirit's power, and illustrated by pictured scenes in which Jesus moved as Helper, Healer, Saviour, Sufferer, brought home the glorious truth to her heart that for her, poor sinful, ignorant, hopeless Bess Branker, there was a Father, a Friend, a Home, in Heaven.

Anxious questionings and doubtful thoughts were met and slain one by one as they rose in her breast, and the close of that happy evening found Bess, careless of observers and hearers, weeping floods of happy penitential tears, and

exclaiming with raptured lips, "It's a' fur me ;
bless the Lord, it's a' fur me ! Oh, whoi didna
aw know it afore ?"

Why ? She was "in want," and "no man gave unto her," "poor, and maimed, and blind," and no servant went into "the streets and lanes of the city" to bring her in to the Master's waiting feast.

Until then. Blessed "until" of the Seeking Shepherd, who goes after that which is lost, *until He find it.*"



CHAPTER XIX.

BESS DOES "WHAT SHE COULD."

IT was another woman that went home that night in the patched, weather-stained gown, and clattering clogs, and tattered shawl and apron, through the snowy streets to the fireless room in the dreary court; for poor Bess Branker was henceforth a new creature in Christ Jesus!

The work was deep and real; Bess's faith was simple as a child's, and her whole heart went out in love and trust to Him who had done so much for her. Had done? Yes, and *was doing*. "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast Thou perfected praise." And poor, ignorant Bess had grasped, with the simplicity of unquestioning faith, the glorious truth that so many more privileged children of the Kingdom miss, or at least fail to realize, that Jesus not only died but *lives* to save.

Strong in this faith, she set herself to the else impossible task of vanquishing her old evil habit. How hard that task was it is, perhaps, hardly possible to realize. She was as we have said, what with toil and hardship and excess, old before her time; in a state of health, moreover, in which, in easy circumstances, she would have been forbidden to leave the house. Rheumatic and bronchial, it was suffering to her to encounter raw fogs, and biting winds, and driving rain, let alone to struggle against them laden beyond her strength. No hope of comfort at the end of a day's toil sustained her. Temptation beset her at every turn. Old companions met her with well-meant offers of "treating," or keen-pointed jibes and jeers. The hot tea, or soup, or cocoa, which sometimes stood her in good stead, were in most districts unattainable to her, never but once bestowed by kindly household hands. And Sam, roused to fury by opposition, often thrashed her soundly for refusing to share what he else had fought to retain.

But through all He in Whose living love and

power she trusted brought her victorious day by day. "Aw jist look oop to th' Lord, and He heartens me," was her simple explanation of the prodigy to those who wondered and questioned. "Toime wur when aw thowt t' drink wur my best friend, and theers mony as thinks t' same, but eh-h-h, lad, they'm out on it! Aw know better now—theer's One as give His precious loife-blood fur me, and aw want no heartenin' now but His loove, and His presence i' my heart, and his smoile boy-and-boy, when He calls me whoam oop yon, and happen says to me, as He did to t' poor sinful lass as poured her sweet-stooff over His blessed feet o' earth, 'Tha's done what tha' could, Bess!'" And the mocking jeer was silenced, and the wonder grew deeper, and into many a rough heart the conviction sank, "There must be something in it."

The weeks that passed so, in spite of increased sufferings from cold and hunger, and increased brutality from Sam, were very happy ones to Dot. Bess's growing feebleness made it absolutely needful that she should accompany her on her

rounds, and to be alone together made up for much to both of them. And Sam was often out in the evenings; stolid and unsocial of nature, so long as fire and drink and tobacco were forthcoming in sufficient quantity in his own quarters he cared for nothing further; but of late he had been driven to look up his old "pals." This gave Bess and Dot many a quiet hour of loving talk together—hours embalmed in life-long memory by Dot. The child was the teacher, in that she retailed all that she heard at school, but Bess was a wonderfully apt scholar, and her faith and love and joy grew stronger every day.

Alas for Dot! her bodily strength decayed as fast. But neither of them thought how near she was to the home "up yon," of whose beauties and glories Bess loved to talk, and Dot to sing. The one was inured to suffering, the other a child, inexperienced and hopeful.

It was a Sunday evening in February, cold and frosty. Bess was sitting, as she had sat on the last evening of the old year and of her old life, on the broken box before a handful of dying embers,

her elbows on her knees, her head upon her hands. But, ah! how changed was the face which from time to time she raised with a bright, upward look of love and trust, from the bruised and flushed and hopeless one she had turned then on Dot. Coarse it was still, and bronzed and blowzed above its haggard pallor, but like the pure frosty sunlight through the grimed window-panes, the spirit, purified by heavenly love and faith, shone through the defacing stains of sin and sorrow, and made it a pleasant and a wondrous sight. All bent and drooped as she sat, the very bearing of her body was changed. Weakness and suffering were in it, but not despondency.

Suddenly she roused herself. "T' soon's gone from t' window," she said aloud, "t' choildt 'll be whoam soon," and rising she put the few remaining bits of coal and the kettle on the fire. Then she sank down gasping and strangely faint. "Aw conna think what's a-coomin' to me," she panted. "Aw'm wikker nor a cat." Then her face changed with the shock and awe of a sudden thought.

"Bin aw goin' to dee?" she questioned. "Happen aw am!"

She thought a moment, then looked up with brightening face, "To dee! that's to go whoam to Thee, Lord! Eh-h-h, but Tha knows aw'd be rare and glad, but—theer's Dot."

Yes, there was Dot. And there she was coming in with pinched, white face, and shining, loving eyes. "Oh, mother, I have such a beautiful story to tell thee, and I can sing all—but tha looks—queer, mother!"

"Ay, aw'n had a bit o' a faint turn, but aw'm a' reet now," said Bess, with a keen pang at her heart. "We'n ha' a coop o' tay.i' coomfort afore Sam cooms, and then tha shall tell me thi story. Eh, my blessin', my blessin', what ud aw do wi'out Him as Tha's led me to *now?*" she exclaimed, fervently, as Dot knelt beside her and looked into her haggard face with anxious, loving eyes.

"Why fur does tha say 'now' like that, mother?" she asked fearfully.

Bess could not find the heart to tell her. "It'll coom to her i' toime, poor lamb," she thought

sorrowfully, "and happen He'll leave me wi' her a bit longer nor I think." So she fenced Dot's question with fond words and caresses.

They had their tea—a poor and scanty meal it was; but love was there and made it a feast to both. Then they blew out the candle, and sat close together in the darkness by the dull and dying fire, and Dot told her "beautiful story"—that of the poor sinful woman dragged before Jesus by fierce accusers who thirsted for her blood, and bidden by Him to "go, and sin no more."

Bess listened with streaming tears. "Eh, but it wur jest loike Him," she said. "And oo wouldna sin no more, Dot? Oo couldna, oh, oo couldna! T' stones them cruel men ud fain ha' throwed ud ha' crooshed oo's poor body, but eh-h-h, them words and looks o' forgivin' loov ud break her *heart!* Oo *couldna* sin no more!"

Then Dot sang her newly-mastered hymn, "We speak of the realms of the blest." And then they talked together of "what it must be to be there!"

It was yet early in the evening when Sam came

in. He swore at the dark and fireless state of the room, rather as a matter of course than from special ill-humour, for when Dot tremblingly lit the candle, he appeared elate and unwontedly gracious. Setting a quart bottle of spirits and a thick twist of tobacco on the table, he dived into his pockets, and to Dot's amazement produced a handful of money. "Here, Dot, tak' th' box an ax Mrs. Flanagan t' oblige us wi' a bit o' coal," he said, flinging her a two-shilling-piece, "and get's a froi' o' bacon from Moll Danks's, oo's oppen yet—a good un, moind, and a fresh loaf, and we'n a' ha' a good soopper."

Dot obeyed with equal wonder and alacrity; her conscience had not yet been exercised on the subject of Sunday trading.

Then he turned to Bess: "Cheer oop, owd lass. Aw'n had a good haul, and aw'll go whacks wi' thee." And he held out to her one of the many sovereigns he had in his hand.

But Bess did not offer to take it, "Tha's noan coom by it honest, Sam," she said, in a troubled voice.

"What's that to thee?" he retorted sullenly.

"It's this, Sam, as aw'd rather dee nor touch a penny of it, if it isna."

"What's tha mean, tha fou'?" roared Sam, in sudden passion.

"Aw dunno' mean t' anger thee, Sam; tha means koind fur once," said poor broken Bess, trembling before her tyrant. "But if tha got yon brass by sin, as aw'm weliy sure tha has, it ud be sin i' me to share it wi' thee; and aw conna sin no more, oh, aw conna, Sam—fur ——"

"Tak' that i'stead, then," said the embruted wretch, dealing a blow that felled her to the floor.

Over the scene that followed we draw a veil. Suffice it to say that when poor Dot came panting and bright-faced in, laden with the coals and provisions, she found her poor mother stretched bleeding and senseless on the floor.

She knew better than attempt to go near her till Sam's fury had abated and his wants were supplied. Bess was conscious by then, and smiled at her, and signed to her to make no fuss,

and go and eat her supper. Dot obeyed, but with a very sick heart.

After a time Bess raised herself, wiped the blood from her face, and with Dot's help got into bed. She was sick and faint and shivering, but cheered Dot with the whispered assurance she should be "a' reet i' th' mornin'." They dared not talk, and as Bess seemed comfortable and sleepy, Dot soon stole away to her heap of straw in the opposite corner.

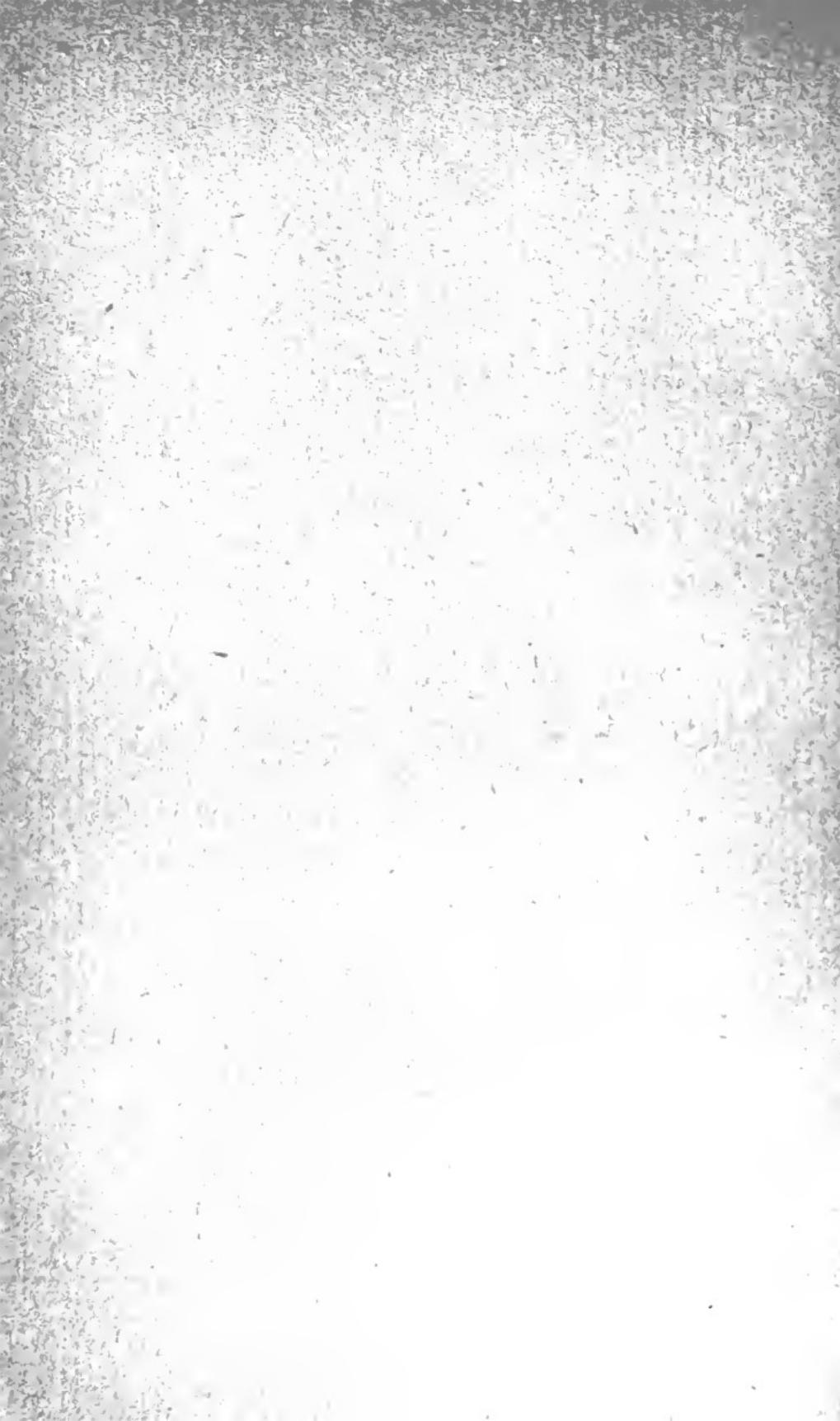
But often as just such a thing had happened before, Dot was uneasy and could not sleep, though Bess seemed to do so, and soundly. Long after Sam, having drunk himself drunk, had flung himself down and sunk into safe unconsciousness, she lay awake, wishing, with strange and growing intensity, that her mother would move and speak to her.

At last she could bear it no longer, and springing up, crossed the room, dimly lighted still by a few red embers. "How art tha now, mother?" she whispered, leaning cautiously over and touching her.

There was no answer. Dot called again and again. Still no answer.

"Whatever makes her sleep so sound; she's had no drink?" she cried, in sick and sudden terror. "Mother, *mother*, MOTHER!" Her voice rose to a wail, all fear of Sam forgotten in the strange and deadly dread that seized her.

But there was no answer; for Bess knew "*what it was to be there!*"



CHAPTER XX.

THE DARK HOURS BEFORE THE DAWN.

YES, poor Bess was "gone," as the neighbour, dragged from her bed by Dot, declared, to the poor child's bitter and bewildered grief—gone from that wretched garret-room to the fair, sweet home "up yon!"—gone from brutal Sam, and pain, and toil, and temptation, to the joy-giving presence of the King—gone, too, from poor little Dot!

Poor, poor little Dot! Words cannot picture the bitterness of her grief and desolation. No one took much heed of her. Untimely care and suffering had taught her self-control unnatural to her age, and she shrank, as a suffering animal shrinks from observation, from the rude attempts at consolation made by the rough beings around.

Poor Bess was buried without much ado, the dispensary doctor, from whom she from time to time had had medicine, certifying that she suffered from mortal disease, and holding that the violence, of which visible token was left, had had no part in her death. Sam, overjoyed by an escape which his guilty conscience told him he little deserved, buried her decently with part of his ill-gotten gains, and held a carouse to her memory in the room for which the lodging-keeper had wisely exacted a month's rent in advance.

Dot had little to suffer from him but neglect, and the horror and hatred she felt of his presence, so long as his money lasted. But that gone, a terrible life began for her. There was no one now to help her to work out his requirements, to come between her and his savage and senseless anger. It was no uncommon thing for her, after spending the day fasting, in vain hopes of being able to scrape together the stipulated sum, to go home at midnight, her task undone, too glad if only she might escape cruel abuse and blows, by creeping exhausted and supperless to bed. But this was

too seldom, as the bruises on her poor little emaciated body testified.

It may be wondered that she did not attempt to emulate Joey Winter's example, and provide for herself such food and shelter as she could. But childhood is pitifully dependent, and clings instinctively to the merest semblance of protection and support. That wretched room was *home* to Dot, endeared by many a memory, and she never thought of leaving it, save for the one "up yon" where Bess was gone.

But, oh, how she longed to be there! How she prayed to Jesus to take her there, soon, soon! How she hoped for and expected the answer night by night as she lay down, weaker, fainter, sadder than ever before, and fell asleep watching for the angel that Jesus would surely, oh, surely send at last!

But morning after morning dawned upon her through the grimed window of the wretched room, stripped now of everything that would either sell or burn. For a time she bore up bravely. But gradually the sickness of hope deferred stole over

her heart, and then cruel doubts and dreary questionings arose. *Did* Jesus hear? *Did* He know? *Did* He care?

To add to her sorrows, kind Mr. Kay was ill, and his place supplied by one whose manner was little calculated to win the hearts or rule the spirits of the wayward imps he would fain have helped and taught. Consequently the class was in confusion; and the teacher, angered and stern, confused the innocent with the guilty, and poor little reluctant, sorrowful Dot, pushed and pinched by her obstreperous fellows, came in for sharp rebuke instead of comfort.

Poor, little, desolate, uncomforted, uncared-for child! no wonder the terrible conviction that she had made a mistake somehow overwhelmed her at times, though in the main she clung with desperate persistency to her faith and hope in Jesus.

"Happen He hasn't got my place *quite* ready yet, and in course He won't take me till it is. I never liked mother to come home till I'd got t' room nice and straight, however sorry I was for her to be out i' th' cold and rain," she would tell

herself, with the child-logic that is so simple and so true.

So the time went on. March was going out in brilliant sunshine and biting winds—pleasant to the healthy and well-dressed, perilous to the feeble and ill-clad. Dot was very weak by now; her bare, tender feet could scarcely carry her; her limbs were numbed with the piercing wind; and her chance among her boisterous fellow-vendors was less than ever.

She sank down one evening, giddy and faint, upon a grid from which a welcome warmth and odour rose. But almost at the moment a dreaded grasp was on her shoulder, a voice, terrible in her ears, bade her "move on." She started up in terror, and staggered giddily against a boy clad in red uniform, with papers under his arm, who had paused on seeing her in the policeman's grip.

He caught and steadied her kindly enough. "Why, it's never Dot Branker!" he exclaimed, as she turned her pinched white face and great dark-lashed eyes upon him—to recognize in him the boy who had helped Bess with her basket up the

stairs on the fatal day of Sam's return, and who, according to her promise, Bess had "remembered" with many a kindness after.

"Yes, but it is though," gasped Dot. "Oh, Phil, don't let t' bobby take me; I've done nowt."

"I'm sure you haven't, and see—he's gone; you were in people's way, you know, that's all. But how bad and miserable you look, Dot! Whatever's come to you?"

"Oh, mother's dead," sobbed Dot, "and Sam's fearful bad to me—beats and starves me. I've had nowt but a candle since breakfast yesterday."

'*A candle?*'

"Ay, a candle; it wur nasty, but there wur nowt else, and I wur welly clemmed. It wur late," she continued apologetically, "nigh eleven when I got in, and Sam, he just ketched up my brass and off wi' him to t' ginshop, and I'd had nowt all day for fear o' going home short, and theer wur a candle burning i' a bottle, and another lyin' by, an' I eat it, Phil,* and, oh, Sam did beat me for it!"

* A fact.

"The brute!" exclaimed Phil, grinding his teeth. Dot and he had been great friends once. "Whatever do you stay with him for, Dot? He's not your father."

"No; but I've nowhere else to go, Phil."

"Why, they'd take ye into the Home. Wouldn't ye like to go?"

"What Home?" asked puzzled Dot. "Up yon, where Jesus and mother is?"

"No, the Home for Destitute Children. Why, it ud be the very thing for ye, Dot. Haven't you never heard of it?"

"No," said Dot wearily, and her eyelids drooped.

"Why, I believe ye're just ready to faint!" exclaimed Phil. "Hold up a bit, my dear, and I'll stand ye a cup of hot coffee and a bun with my own money—earned honestly, too; so come along," and he put his arm round the frail little sinking figure and supported her into a shop.



CHAPTER XXI.

GOD'S ANGEL SENT AT LAST.

THE hot coffee was just what Dot needed, and soon brought back the colour to her white lips and the light to her hollow eyes. They turned very gratefully on Phil then. "Tha was al'as good to me," she said. "But it's a long time since I've seen thee, Phil."

"Yes, it is; but if I'd known you were in such trouble, I'd have looked you up before, for I'm not afraid to go anywhere now, Dot;" and he drew himself up proudly.

"Tha does look nice, Phil," said Dot, looking admiringly at his neat, comfortable dress, and bright rosy face. "And happy, too," she added, with a sigh.

"And I am happy, Dot," he said joyfully;

"for I've got a fresh start in life.* I'll make a man of myself yet, with God's help. You know what a bad boy I was, Dot, and how your poor mother used to warn me I should come to a bad end? And so I should, but for Mr. Saville; for I'd got hard and reckless like. You see nobody had ever cared over-much for me; father was so drunken—and mother—she was not my own mother, you know—so hard and grudgin'; and when, led on by books as I had read, which made a free life seem a fine thing, I ran away, they and all my friends turned their backs on me. I got among a bad lot, and took to thievin' and gamblin', and all sorts of wickedness. The worst was, as I think now, that I'd a face and way that people trusted, and I was so sharp and cunning that they were long in finding me out. But I always was found out at last, and at last I had to hide in the worst slums and sometimes to sleep in the streets for fear of being taken up. That was why I never came to see you, Dot, or your mother as was so

* Phil records the actual experience of a boy rescued by the Manchester Childrens' Aid Society.

kind to me. Old Moll Danks had caught me robbing her till, and I dursn't pass her shop till I'd paid her up—which, thank God, I have done now,—only last week, though. Well, I was about as wretched and as hopeless and as wicked as a boy could be, when I heard of Mr. Saville bein' such a friend of poor outcast lads. I didn't think it would be much good, but I went and made a clean breast of it to him. And oh, Dot, he might have been my father, he was that kind and tender! He took me into the News Brigade, and told me as he trusted me *because* I was a bad boy whom nobody else could trust! And I vowed in my heart that he should never repent it, and I know now he never will, for I've found my Saviour since, and know He'll give me grace to stand; and I'm makin' a good livin' now, and lookin' to do better still;—but here I'm stoppin' talkin' at the best sellin'-time of the day. You go straight home now, Dot; you're not fit to be in the streets; and take another bun to eat as you go along. There, keep up your heart, you poor little dear, for I'll tell Mr. Saville about you.

You live at the old place yet, I s'pose?" he turned back to ask: "All right!" and with a cheery nod and smile he left her.

Dot went her way cheered and comforted by the pleasant food and Phil's kindness, but she still felt strangely tired and weak and dreamy, and turned mechanically homeward, as Phil had bidden her—a thing she would hardly have dared to do had not her senses been partially benumbed by cold and weakness.

In her faintness she had hardly taken in the meaning of Phil's words about a home into which she could be received, and his parting promise, "I'll tell Mr. Saville about you," which meant everything of hope and comfort and assurance to him, meant almost nothing to her. At least she did not think about it, or, indeed, about anything but getting out of the cruel wind, and laying her little aching limbs to rest in the comparative warmth of indoors.

When at last she crept wearily into the court it was all astir. Unkempt men and frowsy women and eager-faced children were gathered at every



"HERE'S A GO-DOT."



door and window with excited looks and busy tongues. Something had evidently happened—what, poor listless Dot would not have paused to ask, but no sooner did the children, her subjects in happier days, her tormentors in these, catch sight of, than they surrounded her.

"Here's a go, Dot," cried one. "Thi feyther's tooked up," shouted another. "Ketched like a rat i' a trap," exulted another. "For breakin' in," explained another. "And oo'll get his fourteen years sartin," promised another. "Arn't tha glad?" "Arn't tha sorry, Dot?" "And what'll tha do now, Miss Branker?" vociferated the rest.

Poor Dot stood helpless and bewildered in their midst till a woman came to her rescue "Let t' poor lass aloan; it's noan her faut," she said, scattering them right and left. "Ne'er tha moind, my lass; tha'll be better off in t' workhouse than wi' *him*, that tha will," she added for comfort.

The workhouse! That was a name of horror to Dot, made so by pauper-bred Bess.

She turned silently away, and crept unmolested

up the stairs, though she had to pass the lodger-keeper in the doorway. Bridget Flanagan had a softer heart than Mrs. Weeks. "Sure an' she'll have to go to the workhouse, poor little crayther," she heard her say. "But oi'll let her be for the noight."

The workhouse again! Poor Dot gave a great tearless sob and passed on.

She went into the empty, fireless room, almost dark, for the clear March twilight could not pierce the thick griminess of the few remaining windowpanes, and shut the door upon herself. A sense of utter desolation was upon her. "Oh, mother, mother, mother!" she sobbed, "how *could* tha go and leave me all alone!"

For a time she wept with a bitter hopelessness of passion which exhausted her, but by degrees her tears grew soft and healing.

Dirty, ragged, ignorant, uncared-for child as she was, in her little believing heart—oh, wondrous condescension!—dwelt the Spirit of the living God, the Comforter; and His still small whispers brought to her remembrance Jesus—Jesus the

loving One, the pitying One, the unrejecting One, the all-knowing and all-caring One! Jesus who was dead and is alive!

Back over her little chilled heart rushed the ebb'd tide of love and faith, and the holy watching eyes, from whose gaze earth's night and darkness hid her not, saw sweet smiles flit around the cold, blue lips, and hope-lights gleam in the great tear-drowned eyes.

Soon she rose, and, kneeling as she had knelt for her first prayer on the slushy pavement of the court, and so often, often since, with clasped hands and upturned, imploring face, she prayed, "O Lord Jesus, *please* let me come home to Thee and mother. To-neet, Lord, please to-neet; for Tha knows as Sam's took up and I connan stay here no longer, and they'll send me to t' workus to-morrow. So please, oh, *please*, Lord Jesus, send th' angel for me to-neet!"

The little plaintive voice ceased. Dot had said her say. But for a moment or two she knelt on. Then she sprang up with a sudden rapturous cry, "*He will! He will!* I feel it i' my heart!"

she exclaimed. "Oh, how good He is! He knows I gonna bear no more! It's been awful hard—but it's all over now!"

"All over now," she repeated, as she laid herself down, and shivering, drew up the dirty sack that was her only covering. "All but waitin' a bit till t' angel comes. And then—oh, *won't* it be nice to be there?"

Yes, little Dot, it was all over now! Love and home were waiting you. Even then God's messenger was taking the orders of the King to "bring you in."

But not to the home "up yon" yet.

An hour or two later Dot was roused from a sleep—into which she had sunk while happily, hopefully waiting for the angel—by the flash of a light upon her eyes. She started up eagerly, but, half-fearful of what she might see, covered her dazzled eyes.

"Do not be frightened, my dear," said a kind, soft voice; "I am come to take you away to a happy home, where you will be loved and cared for, and never be cold or hungry again."

Dot looked up then, reassured; for the voice was only something like Mr. Kay's, and when she looked into the face that was bending over her, it was just like a gentleman's, and the light that had dazzled her looked very like a tallow dip!

But Dot was not all at once disillusioned. "Please, sir, are you God's angel?" she asked timidly.

The gentleman was startled. For the moment he thought Dot was delirious. But her large earnest eyes were clear and rational, and the cheek and hand he hastily touched were flabby and cold. "I am God's servant, at any rate, my poor child," he answered. "He has sent me to help you. But why do you ask that?"

Dot told him, and as use brightened her half-numbed faculties, and she became conscious that beside the stranger stood Phil Day, triumphant and smiling, her voice took an unmistakable tone of disappointment.

Her new friend noted it, and answered her plaintive conclusion, "And I thought He would!" spoken with brimming eyes, by saying, "And so

He has Dot. Not just as you expected, but as He thought best. Instead of an angel He has sent a servant; and instead of taking you to the eternal home where He and your mother are, He is sending you to an earthly one where you will be very happy—won't she, Phil?"

"I should think so!" answered Phil, with enthusiasm, and a nod and a smile at Dot.

"And where you will be taught to do something for Jesus who has done so much for you," Mr. Saville continued, "and grow up a good and happy woman, blessed and a blessing. You will like that, won't you, Dot?"

"Yes, sir; oh *yes!*" she answered earnestly. Then looking up with dawning confidence into her new friend's face, she said tremulously, "Mother used to call me her little blessing."

"Did she? That was nice! Well, little Dot, I think Jesus means you to be somebody else's blessing, so we must take care of you for Him."

"Somebody else's blessing!" The words sank deep into Dot's heart, and became the motto of her life.

CHAPTER XXII.

A PLACE OF REFUGE.

DOT'S brief disappointment was soon lost in grateful wonder. Mr. Saville wrapped her in a warm plaid, and carried her—she was too dizzy and weak to walk—down the stairs she had so often trod with tired, fearful feet, and placed her on the cushions of what, to her, was a splendid carriage, though really an ordinary street cab, and they were whirled away out of the dreary slums into the broad familiar streets, where they dropped Phil, and into a wide road, now open on either side, now flanked with handsome houses. It was a bright moonlight night, and excitement had raised Dot above her weakness, so with senses all alive, she gazed, and wondered what was coming next.

For what seemed a very long time they rolled

on and on ; then came the street of a village, and Mr. Saville, closing the note-book in which he had been absorbed, said, "Here we are at home, Dot," as the cab bowled round a corner and drew up before a row of large, substantial houses, standing high above the road, with gardens and shady trees in front.

Dot had often been at the door of such, and peeped furtively in, and wondered what it must feel like to live in such nice places, and now she was actually going in !

She could hardly believe it, however, till the door was opened by a bright-faced, neatly-dressed servant-maid, who, the moment she saw it was Mr. Saville, and how accompanied, flung it wide with a beaming smile, and stood aside for them to enter ; and they passed into a hall, not so very large in reality, but which, with its lamp and broad staircase, high white ceiling, and tinted text-hung walls, seemed splendid in size and beauty to slum-bred Dot.*

* Lest the reader should be misled by *Dot's* impressions of the Home for Little Girls, George Street,

They stood there a moment or two, while the maid, hardly waiting for Mr. Saville's request, ran up the stairs to find the "mother." A strange feeling came over Dot as she looked round, a feeling as if this was the home "up yon" after all, and that it would be Bess that would come down those beautiful stairs, and that Jesus Himself would be somewhere, perhaps in the grand room yonder, with the half-open door. And though it was a face and figure very different from that of the poor street-hawker that quickly presented itself there, something of the feeling remained with her all through that night's new and delightful experiences.

"Well, mother, I've brought you another child, you see," Mr. Saville called out, as the figure at which Dot gazed so earnestly came swiftly towards them. It was not Bess's. Was it then her Cheetham Hill,—which is here intended,—the author begs to remind him that they are those of a child, accustomed to the squalor and crowding of the slums, and totally unfamiliar with anything else. The homes are simply spacious, well-built houses, plainly and neatly furnished, but scrupulously clean and bright.

own mother's, poor dead Alice's? she wondered. But no; *she* was young and tall, with eyes like her own, Bess had said; and if the penny mirror in which she had once seen herself was to be trusted, *they* were not a bit like the kindly blue ones that were looking at her with such a wealth of love and welcome in their depths.

"And I'm sure I'm very glad you have," was the hearty reply. "I've just been giving a good-night look at the others, and wishing the new bed was filled."

And she stooped down and kissed Dot so tenderly that the tears sprang into her eyes, and she longed to throw her arms round and cling to her as she used to do to Bess in the dear old days, when she was a little happy child. "Poor little dear, how weak and wretched she looks!" she said pitifully.

"Yes," Mr. Saville answered, "she has had a hard time of it, poor child. But," with a bright look at Dot, "it's all over now, and I think the sooner the little new bed is occupied the better, Mrs. Benson. But let me just give her a peep

at her new home first." And taking Dot's hand he led her through the half-open door into the room it afforded a peep into.

A grand room, indeed, it appeared to Dot. It was long and lofty,—two rooms indeed thrown into one,—with the same kind of tinted walls as the hall, and a many-coloured floor, that seemed to Dot too pretty to tread on, and made her think of the streets of gold. At the large end was a long table, and plenty of chairs; at the other a snug little parlour with a bright fire burning, a pretty chair or two, a table spread with books and work, and what Dot would have called "a h'organ," open, and with music on it as if just used.

Mr. Saville watched her face for a moment, and then said, "This is where you will eat your meals and learn your lessons, Dot; there is a famous room to play in downstairs. And that is mother's parlour, where you can go and talk to her and sing hymns. Do you think you will like it?"

"Eh-h-h it's *beau-ti-ful!*" gasped over-

whelmed Dot ; "I shouldn't think t' Queen could have owt nicer!"

Mr. Savile smiled, and led her into the hall again. "Can you read, Dot ?" he asked.

"No, sir," faltered Dot apprehensively.

"Never mind, you will soon learn now. But you see those large letters over there !" He pointed to a text painted conspicuously on the wall.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I will tell you what they say. 'His children shall have a place of refuge'—that is, of shelter, safety, home. They are God's words, Dot, and you see how true they are. He has brought you, His poor little child, here, where you will never be beaten or starved or lonely any more. So don't forget to thank Him to-night, my dear, and love and trust Him always, for you see how much He cares for you."

And then he said good-night, and went, and the kind lady and bright-faced maid took Dot upstairs, and stripped off her wretched rags, and put her in a large hot bath, with plenty of pure

clear water, which made Dot think of the "water of life" flowing "freely, freely, freely," of which she had so often sung in the Ragged School ; and then they put on her a night-dress, so purely, brightly white, that she thought directly of the robes of shining white in the home "up yon," and half believed herself there ; and then they laid her in a little bed with clean white sheets and warm coverings which stood empty beside a row of others just like it, on which sleeping heads were resting, in such a clean, bright, airy room !

And then as she lay, wondering at the unimaginable niceness of everything, the mother herself brought her some delicious hot bread-and-milk ; sat by her until she had eaten it, and then kneeling down by her bed, thanked the kind Heavenly Father who had brought His little child to a place of refuge, and asked Him to bless her, and teach her, and make her grow up a true and faithful servant of Jesus.

As she bent over Dot and kissed her good-night, she saw a question in her loving, shining eyes. "What is it, dear ?" she asked ; "you

know you are at home now, and must not be afraid of anything. You want to ask me something, I think?"

"Oh yes, please," said Dot, raising herself with earnest eagerness. "Oh, *please* does tha think as mother knows how well I'm off?"

"Where is she, dear?"

"In the home up yon, wi' Jesus. Oh, and in course she'll know," she interrupted herself, her face radiant with a sudden thought, "how stupid I am. *In course* Jesus knows, and *in course* He'll tell her, cos it'll make her so happy!"

And she sunk back *satisfied*.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AT HOME.

IT was a life new and strange, indeed, in all its surroundings and conditions, upon which Dot now entered. But very soon it and they seemed quite natural to her. For it was a natural, God-meant life—a life of family love and interests and rule. There were the happy waking and the merry dressing ; the gathering round the plain, plentiful breakfast-table, with “mother’s” kind face at its head ; then the cheery bustle of getting off to school ; the happy scamper home to play in the playground behind the house if fine ; in a large light cellar-room below if wet ; then dinner, and off to school, and home again to tea ; and then the lesson hour, and the pleasant aftertime of books or toys or needle, and talk with mother ; and then the united evening hymn and prayer, and happy, safe good-night. Then there were

holidays and half-holidays, with play and pleasant walks, and treats of sights and festivals. And over, and uniting all, the firm, soft rule of Christian love.

Happy and well-cared for, Dot soon shook off the effects of the terrible hardships she had endured, and when another March came round, the pretty, bright-eyed, dark-haired, neatly-dressed child, with the sunny temper and gentle ways, could scarcely have been credited as a development of the poor little weird-faced, elf-locked, hollow-eyed, emaciated street waif, to whom God's messenger had been sent that bright, bleak night a year ago.

Nor was it in body alone that Dot had prospered and progressed. Apt and intelligent, and spurred on by her eager desire to read for herself the Word of the kind, heavenly Father and loving Saviour, to Whom she owed all the blessings of her blessedly-changed lot, she soon made up for lost time at school. Affectionate by nature, her love and gratitude to her earthly rescuers were boundless, and found expression in truly filial



"SOMEBODY ELSE'S
BLESSING"



obedience and ready joyful help in all possible ways. And the faith that had cheered her little desolate heart in the old dark days grew and flourished, and bore pleasant fruits of truth, and kindness, and self-denial, and patience, and trustworthiness, in the congenial atmosphere of a Christian home. Was mother tired or poorly or overpressed with work, Dot was always aware of it, and ready with thoughtful care and willing, and soon skilful, fingers. Was a little one fretful or sick, it was always for Dot it cried, and never in vain. Was a sister burdened with lessons or work, Dot was always ready with cheer and help; and these without question of cost to herself. For to be still, after service rendered or comfort given, "somebody else's blessing" was her sweet, unselfish prayer. And so, in growth in stature, grace, and wisdom, amidst simple happy duties and pleasures and interests, the days and years of Dot's home-life went by. She did not forget the past, and her memory of it served as a dark background on which the present stood out fair and clear and

praise-inspiring. Two links bound her to it,— her grateful, loving remembrance of the mother of her orphaned childhood, and intercourse with Phil Day, who had played so important a part in her rescue. He continued to do well, and Dot and he met pretty often, and, as may be supposed, liked talking over the old times together, and, somehow, got to feel as if they belonged to each other.

Dot had, of course, her joys and her sorrows, her conflicts and her victories, her falls and her difficulties, as every one, especially every child of the Kingdom, must have in a life which is only God's school-time, whatever may be its conditions, and however long it may last. But only one incident need be recorded here.

It happened about a year and a half after Dot's home-coming. She had soon found out that she had a taste for drawing, which became her favourite amusement. A kind friend had given the children a beautiful box of colours, as joint possession, with plenty of paper and pencils, so Dot had every facility for cultivating her taste.

One half-holiday she was attempting a long-contemplated task,—that of copying the card that Bess had taken from her own mother's dead hand, and which had borne to her the first sweet sounds of her Saviour's voice. Kept in her bosom from the time that Bess had given it to her, till the possession of a box of her own gave her a better keeping-place, it was, despite zealous care and wrappings, somewhat begrimed and bent, but perfectly legible.

She was absorbed in the delightful difficulty of her self-imposed task, when the mother entered the room in which Dot sat alone, accompanied by a delicate, sad-looking lady—a stranger, who had evidently come to see the Homes. Dot was accustomed to this, and, after rising to salute the visitor, went on with her drawing. But she could not help hearing what was said.

The lady was delighted with all she saw. "Only it makes me feel more than ever what a cumberer of the ground I am," she said, in a sad, despondent voice. "I have neither health nor wealth, but their opposites. *I can do nothing*

to help *any one*. There will not be one star in *my crown*."

The sadness of her voice and words touched Dot, as any one's trouble was sure to do. She looked up with earnest eyes, longing to comfort her with the thought that rose in her mind: "Jesus is satisfied when we do what we can." But, of course, she could not presume to speak when not spoken to, and went on with her drawing:

It did not signify. God Himself was going to give comfort to His sad one.

She came and looked over Dot's shoulder. "How nicely you are doing that, my dear," she said kindly. "May I look at it? I am very fond of drawing."

Dot flushed with pleasure, and pushed her board, with pattern and copy, towards her. To her surprise, the expression of kindly interest on the pale, sad face changed suddenly to one of startled wonder, and it was the pattern, not the copy, that was taken up and scrutinized. Then, "Wherever did you get *this?*" was asked, smilingly and curiously.

"Mother took it out of my own mother's hand after she was dead," answered Dot.

"Indeed!" and the lady looked at Mrs. Benson for explanation.

"Dot does not refer to me," she said, preferring that Dot should tell her own story.

"No, ma'am," said Dot; "I mean my mother that was before I came here. She is dead, too," she added, with starting tears.

"And was it she that had the card?"

"No, ma'am—at least she kept it for me; but it was my own mother's, really."

"Tell the lady all you can about it," said Mrs. Benson; for the visitor still looked perplexed and eager.

So Dot went on:—"My own mother died when I was quite a baby, ma'am. She was very poor—had worked herself to death, mother said, to keep me and herself out of the workhouse. At last she got too ill to sew any more, and the lodging-keeper would have turned us into the streets; but mother—I mean Bess Branker—took us into her own room and gave us tea and

promised us shelter till my mother could find her friends, and made her lie down on her own bed to rest a bit, never thinking she was near death. But when she came in for the night, she found her dead, ma'am, on her knees, with her arm round me, and that card in her hand. And mother always said it was as if an angel from heaven had brought it to comfort her, there was such a beautiful look of peace and rest on her poor face, which had been so sad and troubled before. And mother,—I mean Bess Branker, ma'am,—who took me instead of her own little baby that had been killed, took care of it for me, and gave it me when Sam—that's her husband, a bad and cruel man—found her out and came back to her. I couldn't read, nor mother; but I got old Simon Todd to read it for me, and they were the first words of Jesus I ever heard, ma'am; and, oh! I can't tell you how it helped and comforted me to think there was somebody that had said them, even before I knew anything about Him."

The lady was weeping now, and it was plain

her tears came from a deeper fount than sympathy with Dot's tale of past sorrows.

"I painted that card," she said at last, "long years ago, when I was sick and sad. A friend, whose active work I had envied, had suggested I could do this at least for Jesus, and I was happy in the work. But of all I did I saw no fruit; some were lost, and all seemed little prized; and when I heard that this one, on which I had spent special pains, had been given away by a crippled woman, in whom my friend was greatly interested, to a strange woman in the street, I lost heart, and did no more."

"Perhaps that woman was my poor mother," said Dot. "She had been out trying to get work the very day she died. Perhaps she will be a star in your crown, ma'am," she added softly and timidly.

"Perhaps so, dear child," answered the lady, with much emotion. "At any rate my feeble faithlessness has been rebuked, and I see that, even to me, my Lord has given and sealed a talent and a work. I cannot ask you for that card, Dot,"

she continued, after a time; "but you will let me have your copy when it is finished, and I will place it on my mantel-shelf, that I may always remember what its story has taught me?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!" answered Dot joyfully; "until I can do a better one at least. And I will do it as well as I can, and spend all my playtime on it to get it done soon."

With thanks and a kiss the sad, despondent "cumberer of the ground" went her way with brightened face and lightened heart, henceforth to do for Jesus "what she could," in happy faith and meek content. And many a sad heart is comforted, and many a hard pillow is made easy, by the tastefully-executed "messages of Jesus" sent out to them by those weak and once listless fingers.

CHAPTER XXIV.

OUT INTO THE WORLD.

MORE than three calm, pleasant years went by. Dot was now a slim, sweet-faced maiden of fifteen—perhaps rather more; she did not know her real birthday, so kept as such the day of her coming to the Home. Very helpful to “mother” she had become, with her quick skilful fingers, and active love-service, and pleasant tact with the little ones. Dot coveted no other work or sphere; but when a lady visitor, attracted by her winning face, and helpful ways, and pleasant, and now pure-toned speech, still more by the tenderness and tact with which she chanced to see her manage a sick and wilful child, whom no one else could rule, pressed upon her guardians the offer of a situation in her own family, as schoolroom-maid and attendant of her youngest child,—a poor little crippled ‘n-

valid,—it was thought best, for her own sake, to accept it for her.

So Dot went out from the dear “place of refuge,” which was still to be “home” to her, to face the trials and temptations of the world. But not alone. He who had overcome was with her —her Saviour, her shelter, and her strength ; and so she went safely and happily on her way.

Her new home was at Wellwood Grange, a pleasant house in the very heart of the fair lake country. Dot quickly gained country bloom and woman’s stature in the pure, strong air ; and though there were some briers in her path, some battles to fight and tears to shed, the two years she spent there were happy ones. Her poor little charge—suffering, spoiled, wayward Annabel Lynde—soon became very dear to her, and Dot had the unspeakable joy of seeing her, moved by the witness she bore of the way Jesus had helped and comforted her in the days when she, too, had been a weary little sufferer,—days of which Annabel was never weary of hearing,—cast herself, with all a child’s unquestioning trust, upon Jesus,

and lead a new and touching life of trust and patience.

But we must pass, with this brief notice only, over this part of Dot's story. At the end of the two years little Annabel died, peacefully and happily, after long and sad suffering, through which Dot was her constant and never-wearying nurse. Then a cousin of Mrs. Lynde's, who had taken a great fancy to Dot during a visit to Wellwood in the preceding spring, wrote and begged that her services might be transferred to her.

Dot had no fancy for the change. She loved her kind mistress, between whom and herself mutual love and care of little Annabel had naturally created a strong bond, and her young ladies, and pleasant Wellwood, and the pykes, and crags, and fells, and spreading lakes, and roaring falls that lay all around it. And Mrs. Wynter-dyke was no attractive prospective mistress. She was an invalid, capricious and peevish and hard to please. But she was given little choice in the matter, and feeling that the pressure put upon

her was that of her heavenly Father's guiding hand, she left pleasant Wellwood, praying that it was to be "somebody else's blessing," and cheered with the promise that when Mrs. Wynterdyke should be better—so it was phrased, every one knowing she could never be better in this world—she should return to her old place and duties.

Wynterdyke was a stately mansion, standing in a wide-spreading, well-wooded park, in a pleasant upland county, and furnished with a splendour of which Dot had had no conception. All that wealth could procure was at the disposal of its mistress. Yet she, still in the prime of her days, was dying, after long years of pining sickness, a broken-hearted, bitter-spirited, disappointed woman.

A trying mistress she had been to serve at all times, wearing out her kindest and best-disposed servants by her unceasing complaints and caprices and exactions, and total disregard of their kindred flesh and blood, specially so now that her long nervous invalidism had developed into active

and painful and, as all but herself knew, fatal disease.

Dot was sorely tried in mind and body at first. For though it seemed as if she never gave satisfaction, that her very patience and gentleness were causes of irritation and offence, the poor sufferer had taken a real liking to her, and would hardly ever dispense with her personal attendance. But when—from the querulous complaints, freely poured out at all times and to all hearers, but with special fulness to the sympathetic young girl who listened so patiently, with such grieved and tender eyes—she understood the story of her life, the great pity which sprang up in her heart combined with the Divine love within her to make it comparative easy to endure.

It was no wonder Dot's fresh young heart was touched. It was, indeed, a tale of sorrow she pieced together bit by bit. Mrs. Wynterdyke, the only and indulged child of a plebeian millionaire, had been married by the heir of Wynterdyke simply to retrieve the fallen fortunes of his house. Unattractive in person, and destitute of tact and

patience, she had lost, rather than gained, in her husband's affections after marriage, and the coldness with which he from the first treated her gradually deepened into neglect and dislike. Her only child—a boy—was drowned at four years old. She never recovered the shock, but sank into a condition of nervous, fanciful ill-health, and lived a self-absorbed, lonely life, alienating her friends by her caprices, her acquaintances by her complaints, and her dependents by her exactions ; her husband the while pursuing his own way, regardless alike of her claims and her love.

For she did love him—the poor unloved, unlovable wife. In spite of her bitter speeches and querulous complaints, it was plainly to be seen that her heart had been, and, in spite of years of coldness and neglect, still was, with him. He was away then on a yachting expedition, undertaken in spite of her pleadings and declarations that she would be in her grave ere his return. As such a declaration had been for years the usual accompaniment of their partings, he must be forgiven for not giving it the heed it now deserved. But

Dot did not know this, and as the end drew manifestly nearer, and the poor sufferer's longings for his return grew more pitifully keen, her tender young heart grew very sore against him.

How she longed to lead the poor dying sufferer to Jesus, to lift her thoughts, chained to herself and earth, to the eternal world towards which she was hastening! But her faith and patience were sorely tried. The habitude of years was painfully strong, and though at times the poor lady would listen while she spoke or read of Jesus, and the home of light and love He had gone to prepare, and sometimes seemed interested and "almost persuaded," she would quickly relapse into querulous occupation with the troubles and sufferings of the present, or the sorrows and wrongs of the past.

It was a lonely and troubled life that Dot lived at splendid Wynterdyke. Parker, the lady's maid, hated her as an interloper, and thwarted and oppressed her in every possible manner; and though her gentle and kindly ways made her a favourite with the rest of the household, she felt

utterly out of place amidst the riot and extravagance and folly of the servants' hall.

She was rarely permitted to be out of her lady's call by day, and the only change she enjoyed all through that dreary winter was a very occasional attendance at the old grey church upon the hill, and one or two visits to a farm a few miles off, to which a violent storm had once driven Mrs. Wynterdyke. She had stayed the night, and enjoyed with the zest of novelty the simple dainties spread before her. Something brought the occurrence to her mind, and fancies for this or that of Mrs. Dale's own making were the result. Some mistake having been made in her first message, she would afterwards trust none but Dot on these occasions.

So Dot got the pleasure of a long breezy walk or drive, in itself delightful to a girl pent in the unnatural atmosphere of a luxurious sick-room, and the still greater one of the kindly hospitality of the farmer and his wife. They were singularly kind to her, and pressed upon her invitations she would have been only too glad to have accepted

had it been possible to her. Not for the change and pleasure alone, for the almost parental tenderness of their manner to her, and something of sadness that blent with it, drew out her heart's affections, in a manner that surprised herself, towards old Mr. and Mrs. Dale.



CHAPTER XXV.

A MEETING AND A PARTING.

THE winter wore away ; the promise of spring awoke in swelling buds and balmy breezes and joyous song, but Dot was a closer prisoner than ever in her lady's sick-room.

The end was coming very near then. Was there hope in it ? Dot trusted so, for she knew how ready and how mighty Jesus is to save ; but in Mrs. Wynterdyke there was little change, except such as increasing weakness brought.

What had been expected for weeks came when none looked for it at last. News of the arrival of Mr. Wynterdyke's yacht at Southampton wonderfully revived his dying wife. Nevertheless, a telegram was despatched urging him to come with all speed. A day, a night, and yet another day of feverish expectation followed ; then came a

sudden change, a swift, half-conscious passage through the dark valley, and the end. To the last the poor lady's eyes wandered between Dot's face and the door, and whether the eager, listening look she wore was for the words of saving love and life Dot spoke, or for the watched-for sounds without—who might tell? But it was something to Dot that the wandering eyes ever returned to her face, that the feeble singers, so long as life lasted, clasped, or rather clung to, her own, and answered the life-words that she spoke with faint yet eager pressure.

That silent, mournful death-bed was a terrible ordeal for a girl so young as Dot to face. But in strength not her own she went calmly through it, and when it was over sank peacefully to the sleep which "He so giveth to His beloved."

It was nearly mid-day when she awoke. Mind and body had been greatly overtaxed of late by her poor mistress's strange fancy for her presence. Yet *was* that fancy so strange? Nurses and maids brought nothing but earthly

comfort and human strength to her service. Dot—girl, almost child as she was—brought the peace and power and hope of a spirit stayed on God.

The consideration of the head nurse won for her her long undisturbed rest. She woke, as was only natural, languid and depressed, with a strange longing for the presence of supporting, protective, earthly love upon her. "If I could but go to the Hill Farm!" she thought; "I feel as if a good cry on kind Mrs. Dale's bosom would be *so* comfortable, and do me *so* much good! How nice it must feel to have some one really *belonging* to you! Of course there's mother and Mr. Saville and Phil, and all the kind people at the Home, but ——" and she sank into a long, deep reverie over her scarcely-tasted breakfast.

The great clock over the stables chiming twelve roused her. "What a baby I am!" she exclaimed, becoming suddenly conscious of the tears that were coursing down her cheeks. "Crying because I have no one to pet and comfort me, when every one is kind, and God so very good!"

For I think, I do think, He let me be a little bit of a blessing to poor Mrs. Wynterdyke. Poor dear lady," she continued, her thoughts turning into the fresh channel, "I did not think I should feel it so sad to have nothing more to do for her. It's just the time I used to fetch the fresh flowers for her room. How fond she was of flowers; they seemed to give her more pleasure than anything! I'll go and ask Macpherson for some—some white ones, and put them around her—it will seem like doing something for her yet."

Macpherson had anticipated her request. One of the under-gardeners was waiting at the usual side-door with a quantity of exquisitely delicate and pure white blossoms. Dot took them straight to the room of death, meeting no one by the way.

She entered through an outer room, the doors of which, chiefly used by the invalid's attendants, had been made to open and close quite noiselessly. Her foot fell, as the heaviest would have done, without sound, upon the rich, moss-like carpet. The windows were of course darkened, and the door opened behind, and to the right of the bed.

Her entrance was therefore unnoticed by a gentleman who stood on its left side, gazing with a troubled rather than grief-stricken face upon the white, wasted countenance of the dead, and his presence was unrecognized by her.

He saw her first—saw a slight young form, a fair and girlish face, pale with grief and natural awe, met at last the sudden, startled gaze of large, grey, dark-lashed eyes. Nothing terrible in the sight, one would think, even in the nerve-shaking presence of the dead. Yet what Dot saw was a florid face turned ghastly pale, a stalwart frame convulsed as if with terror, white quivering hands outspread as if to ward some fearful thing away !

For a moment she stood and gazed in spell-bound surprise, not terrified, as *he* so strangely seemed to be, after the first start. She knew at once that it was Mr. Wynterdyke, though she had slept through, and not been told of, his arrival. "I beg your pardon, sir," she said, quickly recovering herself. "I did not know you were here—or come even."

Mr. Wynterdyke's face relaxed, and his hands

dropped as she spoke. "What—who—who are you?" he stammered, with an oath of which he was probably unconscious, but which sounded fearfully in that solemn presence.

"I am Dorothy Branker, sir," answered Dot. "One of your poor lady's maids. I came to put these flowers around her."

Naturally as she spoke she turned her eyes upon the white, settled face, which wore, even amidst the icy calm of death, its life-look of weary, worn unrest. As she did so a sudden, almost overpowering rush of pitiful remembrance, indignant sympathy, and righteous anger swept through her. She knew it was not her place to speak the burning thoughts that rose within her; she but flashed one look, one speaking look from the dead to the living, and, bursting into a passion of tears, sped from the room.

She little knew, though she marked him cower before it, the double sting that look of righteous, keen reproach had in those clear, grey, dark-lashed eyes of hers for Mr. Wynterdyke.

"Good heaven!" he gasped, with white and

quivering lips, when she was gone. "What a likeness! Just so *she* looked when—tush, what a fool I am!" For he was faint and giddy, and forced to lean against the bed-post for support, and the hand with which he wiped the cold drops from his brow trembled like a leaf.

But he was a strong and strong-willed man, and soon recovered himself. "A chance likeness, doubtless, though a strong one," he muttered, after a few moments. "And coming now and *here* seemed greater than it is. But I must find out who the girl is before I can rest."

Some hours passed before he had leisure to do so. Then he sent for Mrs. Golding, the house-keeper, and broke upon the lengthy speech she thought befitting the occasion by saying abruptly, "I saw a girl, Dorothy—something—she said her name was—in—in the room just now. Who is she, and where did she come from?"

"She came from Wellwood Grange, sir, where she was school-room maid and nurse to poor little Miss Annabel. Mrs. Wynterdyke saw her there, and took such a fancy to her that when Miss

Annabel died she sent for her here. And I must say I don't wonder, for she is a good girl, sir, as good as she is pretty, with a wise little head on her young shoulders, and has been a great comfort to your poor lady, and — ”

“ But *who* is she—where is her home ? ” interrupted Mr. Wynterdyke impatiently.

“ She has none, sir, properly speaking. She is an orphan, and came to Wellwood from some Institution in Manchester.

Mr. Wynterdyke paced twice up and down the room in very apparent agitation. “ Send her to me,” he said then, “ I want to ask her a few questions. She was with Mrs. Wynterdyke at the last, I believe,” he added, with an effort, for Mrs. Golding’s eyes were round with wonder and curiosity.

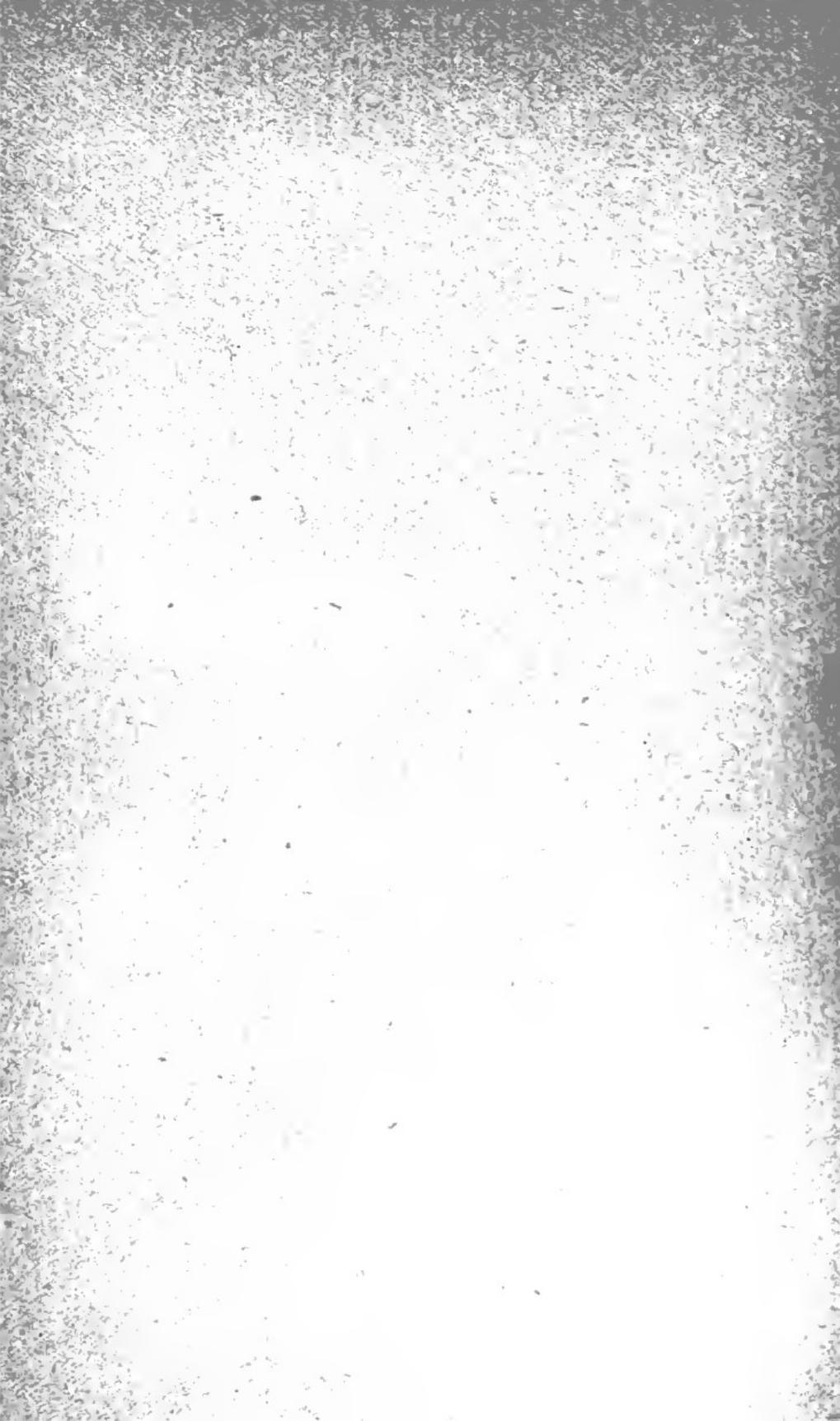
“ Oh yes, sir,” she answered, mollified, and as she thought, enlightened, by this late show of interest in his neglected wife. “ And was the greatest comfort to her, holding her hand and talking as good as any parson. She is a wonderful one at the Bible, sir.”

"Well, well, send her to me," he interrupted impatiently, again beginning to pace the room.

Mrs. Golding executed her commission, much to Parker's indignation, who felt herself and her long service slighted, and to Dot's dismay. But she obeyed at once, inwardly asking that she might say nothing she ought not to say, and leave nothing unsaid that she ought to say.

She little knew how needed, how well-timed, was that prayer for grace and wisdom and guidance!

What passed in that interview none ever fully knew. Dot came forth from it with deeply-flushed cheeks, clear-shining, steadfast eyes, and quiet manner which seemed the calm after some great spiritual storm. And the eyes from which closed doors and shuttered windows hide not, saw left behind, with head bowed low and hidden face, a man whose sin had found him out at last.



CHAPTER XXVI.

BLESSED AND A BLESSING.

HALF-AN-HOUR later Dot was on her way to the Hill Farm. "Mr. Wynterdyke knew—Mr. Wynterdyke had given her leave," she said, in reply to indignant Parker and curious Mrs. Golding. "Her service had ended with her lady's life, he had said, and she was free to go just when and where she would. And that was now, and to the Hill Farm, as Mr. and Mrs. Dale had asked her. Come back? No; she should not come back. Wages? She did not want—could not take them." So, with glowing cheeks and reluctant speech she spoke, and went before any save those two knew of her going.

Naturally that going caused much comment and speculation in the servants' hall that night; and slumbering memories were roused, and gossiping

tongues wagged freely, and conclusions—in most cases, strange to say, secretly foreseen long ago—not far from the truth arrived at.

But little recked Dot of gossiping tongues behind, or of fair, spring beauty around, as she sped with winged feet through park and village and pleasant upland meadows, where the sun shone through the young, wavy grass, and the pure, fragrant breeze fell gratefully on her burning cheeks and brow. Her head was in a whirl of joy, amaze, and pain, and the one clear thought that ran through it all resolved itself into the prayer, “Let me make it all up to them, Lord, let me be *their* little blessing too.”

She had walked at utmost speed till she came to the stile leading to the home-meadow, in which, with its pleasant garden and ricks around, and sheltering grove behind, the stone house, visible since she left the park gates, stood looking upon the village and the old grey church upon the slopes below, and stately Wynterdyke rising amidst its guardian trees beyond. There she paused to breathe and think and lose courage.

"There *may* be some mistake," she thought; "I hope not, oh, I hope not! But I must be careful for their sakes, and try and be sure before I speak."

So, endeavouring to gather up her forces, and calm the beating of her heart, she went slowly up the path. At the garden gate old Mr. Dale—a tall, white-headed man, to whose aspect regular features, close-set lips, keen, clear blue eyes, and the shadow of a settled sorrow, gave an impression of sternness and hardness which intercourse removed—met her with subdued but kindly welcome.

"We hoped you would come, my dear," he said, looking at her with the sad, intent look Dot had often wondered at, but now rejoiced in, though her heart beat wildly under it. "The missus will be glad to see you—at least, as glad as she could be at anything to-day. No, my dear; nothing's the matter," he added, answering the startled question of Dot's eyes. "Nothing new, at least. But it's twenty years to-day since we lost our Alice. Twenty years, and it seems but yesterday. Maybe you never heard of her,

my dear—it's an old story, and folks have forgot her and it, all but the mother and me. And it's best so, best so," he added bitterly.

Dot could not speak; she only fixed on him eager, questioning eyes. "She was our daughter our only child, our darling and our pride," he went on, "and we—lost her—twenty years to-day. But go in, my dear; you are all of a tremble with the long walk and all you've gone through, and I'm wanted in the fold. You'll find the missus a bit upset. She always remembers the day, and it brings it back all fresh-like. But it'll do her good to see you. Maybe we've never told you, my dear, but you've such a look and way of our lost one that it almost seems like having her back when you are here. So run in, my dear; run in, and comfort her all you can. I'm but a poor hand at it myself, for my heart is bitter, bitter against God and man; and the words of a bitter heart are an ill salve for a sore one." He strode off as he spoke, leaving Dot to make her way to the house alone. She did so with clasped hands and a heart full of prayer.

The outer door stood open. Dot entered and passed unnoticed into the large pleasant kitchen, which, with its generous fire-place, and fresh-sanded floor, and milk-white tables, and laden rafters, and air of cheery plenty, had always seemed to her the very ideal of home and comfort. Mrs. Dale was sitting, according to her wont at that hour, knitting in hand, at the window which overlooked the farmyard, where milking was in progress. But her ever busy fingers had dropped listless in her lap, the kitten was playing its maddest pranks with her ball, the tears were coursing slowly down cheeks round and rosy still, in spite of the heart-break of twenty years, and the dark eyes, usually so bright and kindly, were fixed with a look that saw far other things than Jenny with her pail, and Cowslip, the ill-conditioned cow who would never enter the shippon to be milked.

She did not hear light-footed Dot till she was close beside her, and before she could rise to welcome her, Dot was kneeling beside her, with her arms around her, and her eyes looking more

like her lost Alice's than ever. "Dear Mrs. Dale, you are in sorrow, and God has sent me to comfort you," she said.

Mrs. Dale caught her in her arms and kissed her. "It comforts me only to look at your sweet face, my dear," she said. "You are so like, so strangely like, my poor lost darling."

"So Mr. Dale has just told me," replied Dot, controlling herself with a great effort. "I did not know until to-day that you had had a daughter. Will you tell me all about her. *Please* do, Mrs. Dale; and then perhaps God will let me comfort you. No; I am not tired nor hungry. I will just take off my hat and sit here," —drawing up a little wooden stool to Mrs. Dale's side. "So please, Mrs. Dale, tell me about your dear, lost Alice. It's so nice and quiet now, and I do so want to hear. I can tell you afterwards what I have to tell."

Had Mrs. Dale been less absorbed and pre-occupied, she must have noticed Dot's strange impressionment and ill-concealed agitation; as it was, she was only too glad to pour out the love

and sorrow with which her heart was filled into the ears of so eager and sympathetic a listener, though years had passed since, except to the sharer of her loss, she had mentioned her lost one's name. So Dot, with her heart in her eyes, heard part of the story, told with all the tender garrulity of long-repressed and unforgetful love, which we have told briefly but fully, of the done-to-death outcast of the Manchester slums, which she, too, had heard before from Bess Branker's rough but pitiful lips.

"And did you *never* hear from her again," Dot asked, with quivering lips, when, so saying, the poor mother broke down after the bitter relation of the terrible day, twenty years gone by, when Alice's little white bed had been found unpressed, and a note on it, telling why and with whom she had so madly fled. "Did she not write once—just once—only just once?" she pleaded, as if for life.

"Yes; yes—she did—she did," answered the poor mother, wringing her hands. "Oh, my dear, my dear, why did God let it be? Years,

seven long years, went by, and no word came ; but still we hoped and prayed—oh, how we prayed—to God to guard and bring us back our poor lost, wandering lamb ! And then, one day, a letter, dark with age and dust, was brought us. They were altering the village post-office, and it had been found stuck somewhere—I never had the heart to ask where, for when we looked at it —oh, God !—it was from our Alice, our Alice, forsaken and desolate, pining her life away in a great, strange, cruel town, and begging our forgiveness for her baby's sake—her baby, dying like herself of want and misery ! But, oh, Dot, it came too late ! too late ! It was written nigh five long years before !

“ Father went, nigh distracted, to Manchester, and sought and sought, but all in vain. She had sunk like a stone in the deep, black pool of city life, and not a trace of her, living or dead, was left ! But she must have died ; oh, Dot, to think of it ! she must have died of want and heart-break, thinking that we, whose hearts were breaking for her, whose prayers for her went up to God by

night and day, had cast her off unpitied and unforgiven. Oh, Dot, my dear, my dear, why did God let it be ? Tell me, my dear, why did God let it be ? ”

“ I cannot ; I cannot, dear Mrs. Dale,” Dot answered, raising a pale but radiant face. “ But I know it was in love—in love to you, in love to her, in love to—her little child.”

“ Oh, her little child, her little child ! Oh, my dear, if we might but have had that, I could have been almost content to let my Alice go. For she was proud, my poor darling—ay, and pure, for all her headstrong folly, and no more guilty of the lot to which she went, than a lily pulled by a strong and cruel hand, and flung into the mire, is guilty of the stain that mars, the cruel feet that tread it down. She would never have held her fair head up again, my broken, trampled flower ! But, oh, the child, her little child—it was a girl, my dear, and named for me, she said—if God had spared us that ! ”

Then Dot could restrain herself no longer. “ Oh, Mrs. Dale, He has ! He has ! ” she cried.

Grandmother, I am that child, your Alice's child!"

Mrs. Dale turned deadly pale, and clasped her hands upon her heart. "Child! child! do you know what you are saying?" she gasped. Then catching sight of Mr. Dale's tall form at pause in the doorway, "John, John, come here; oh, come here! She says *she* is *her* child, our Alice's child!"

Mr. Dale made but three strides across the great kitchen, took Dot's two hands in his, searched her face with piercing, hope-kindled eyes: "What makes you say that?" he asked, in a voice stern with emotion. "For God's sake, don't, unless you are sure."

"But I am sure," said Dot, with a calmness that surprised herself. "Your Alice's letter was dated from Embden Street, London Road, Manchester?"

"Yes, yes!" both exclaimed, and Mrs. Dale, with shaking hand, drew the letter from her bosom, and held it up.

"And it was from *there*, Bess said, my poor

"BACK....
TO THE OLD DAYS"



T. Pym:

mother—not Bess Branker—did I never tell you *she* was not my real mother?—from Embden Street my own poor mother wrote to her parents; there Mr. Wynterdyke traced your Alice. Oh, God has made it clear as day, as you will say when I have told you all. I never knew it till to-day, or why I loved you both so much. But this morning when I went to put some flowers around poor Mrs. Wynterdyke, Mr. Wynterdyke was there, and almost fainted at sight of me. He thought I was your Alice's ghost, he said, and could not rest till he had questioned me. And then the truth came out. He wanted to atone—to make a lady of me. But I came home to you, praying God to let me make it up to you, to be your comfort and your blessing. Grand-father, Grandmother, will you have me?"

Need the answer be given, or the scene that followed described?



And now we must leave Dot, blossoming up, as Mr. Saville had promised, into a good and

happy woman, blessed and a blessing. It has already been her sweet privilege to lead the sore heart, crushed into bewilderment by sorrow and pain, and the bitter heart, steeled into rebellious disbelief by wrong and mystery, into the light that shines out of, through, and upon, all darkness of sorrow and sin and mystery, in the face of Jesus Christ. She has still, day by day, the joy of making desert lives rebloom, and desolate hearts rejoice. In her God has given them, Mr. and Mrs. Dale meekly own, "more than they had before," in their beautiful, spoiled, wilful Alice.

Dot's cup is very full of blessing, and, day by day, brimming drops run over from it into some one else's less-full vessel. In her happy, healthy country-life, the dream of her old slum-days is more than realized. She does not forget those days, or the old friends, at the Home. How could she, while to them, under God, she owes that she is not still, and in a sadder sense, a waif of the Manchester streets? She is in constant correspondence with them; and many a hamper,

filled with farm-produce, finds its way there from the Hill Farm, and more than one pale-faced rescued waif has bloomed into healthy child-life in a sojourn amidst its breezy fields, and many another will do so yet, for its inmates feel that all they can do to help the Christ-like work of those to whom they owe so much is all too little, and this, they are told, is a help indeed.

Dot still hears from, and often sees, Phil Day, now prospering in a situation of trust on a model farm, not many hours' journey, in these days of steam, from pleasant Wynterdyke. And the old people, as they note Dot's happy face over his letters, or watch them together on his holiday visits, meet eyes and smile, and think, with full content, that before long their blessing will be "somebody else's blessing" too.



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